

DOCTORAL THESIS

Freedom, Power and Collective Desire in Spinoza

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Freedom, Power and Collective Desire in Spinoza

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requirements for the degree of PhD

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Abstract

This thesis attempts to identify a consistent argument for freedom across Spinoza's ethical and political works, premised on the reasonable empowerment of individuals, collectively. Such a freedom is inclusive, relative and common, a 'becoming freer'. Agency is identified through desire, neither morally normative nor intrinsically liberating, but the individual's means for becoming as self-determining as she/he can. It accounts for individuation in Spinoza's thought in terms of empowerment, and proposes a new conceptual model of collective individuation through commonality, collectivity, unanimity and interdependence – the imaginative, affective and conative structures within which individuals join together and multiply their powers. It brings together a diverse set of hermeneutic traditions to this problem of freedom, including continental readings of Spinoza's ontology (Deleuze, Matheron, Negri) and politics (Balibar, Montag, Lordon), with Anglophone, analytical studies of Spinoza's epistemology (Bennett, Curley, Della Rocca, Garrett, Melamed), alongside studies sensitive to the role of the imagination and affects (Gatens, James, Kisner, Rosenthal, LeBuffe, and Saar). Its overarching claim is that freedom in Spinoza is a necessarily political endeavour, realised by individuals acting cooperatively, requiring the development of socio-political institutions that can administer the common good, in accordance with reason.

Chapter 1 analyses the problem of servitude in Spinoza – the conditions preventing individuals from becoming free. Chapter 2 distinguishes conatus from desire, and outlines an ethics of the latter through a model of human power as capability, leading to an intrinsically social, collectivising political project. Chapter 3 presents the unanimity hypothesis, and assesses the roles of imagination, prophecy and religion for producing liberating, i.e. reasonable, collective imaginaries. Chapter 4 gives a new reading of Spinoza's TP in terms of the intrinsic rationale of the state. Chapter 5 debates the conceptual difficulties of political change via indignation and emulation, before outlining a new theory of collective desire.

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secondary schools has been a great pleasure, and an inexhaustible supplier of insights into the strengths and weaknesses of his difficult path to freedom.

Putting 'desire' and 'democracy' together in one phrase elicits no end of discussion. I interrupted the research to undertake a study of collective imaginaries around the British Isles. The effect of this sojourn on the project was immense, transforming a pessimistic hypothesis into a vision of collectively becoming freer. I thank the very many people who assisted me with that project in *Island Story* (Repeater, 2016), but briefly acknowledge my debt here. Similarly, discussing democracy with the diverse clientele of an inner London citizens advice bureau and, later, a homeless hostel where I worked resulted in a wide range of conversations about political rights and power, and I have been fortunate to draw on so many different sources in nourishing this project.

Lastly, I thank Sarah for all her support during the research, and to Ruth, David and Vera for encouraging its completion.

Abbreviations

I follow the standard abbreviations in referring to Spinoza's works: CM = *Metaphysical Thoughts* (*Cogitata Metaphysica*, appendix to DPP); DPP = *Descartes' Principles of Philosophy* (*Renati Des Cartes Principiorum Philosophiae*); E = *Ethics* (*Ethica*); Ep = *Letters* (*Epistolae*); KV = *Short Treatise on God, Man and his Well-being* (*Korte Verhandelning van God, de Mensch en des zelfs Welstand*); TIE = *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* (*Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione*); TP = *Political Treatise* (*Tractatus Politicus*); TTP = *Theological-Political Treatise* (*Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*).

Though I can read Latin to an intermediate level, in most cases I follow Curley's translation of *Ethics* (Spinoza, 1985), and Silverthorne and Israel's translation of the TTP (2007), with reference to Curley's recent translation (2016). Rare differences occur usually via an identified keyword e.g. *vulgus*, and are indicated where I include the original Latin in parentheses. With the TP I usually deviate from Shirley's commonly-used translation (2002) – good in many respects, but whose concessions to lucidity and style compromise the original meanings of the text – and while Curley's recent translation (2016) of the TP offers more accuracy, in many cases I have translated sections myself in order to capture the precise meanings of Spinoza's Latin, using the Gebhardt edition of the *Opera* (1925). References to the CM, KV, TTP and TP indicate chapter number followed by section indicated in Gebhardt e.g. TTP 20.6 is Chapter 20, section 6. TIE adds Gebhardt's paragraph numbers e.g. TIE 14 refers to paragraph 14. Letters refer to their numbering in the *Opera Posthuma* and updated since (2002) e.g. Ep 55 is Letter 55.

References to *Ethics* follow the standard format, with some condensed tweaks: ad = definition of the affects, end of Part 3; agd = general definition of the affects, end of Part 3; app = appendix; a = axiom; c = corollary; df = definition; dm = demonstration; l = lemma; p = proposition; pref = preface; post = postulate; s = scholium. E.g. E4p37s2 refers to *Ethics* Part 4, proposition 37, second scholium.

References to Hobbes' *Leviathan* (1998a) and *De Cive* (1998b) follow convention, giving chapter followed by section e.g. 1998b, VII.6 refers to chapter 7, section 6. Other classic authors are often referred to using this system of chapters and section numbers where applicable, providing a more useful criterion for cross-referencing given the sheer variety of editions of their works.

Introduction

This thesis argues that the philosophy of Benedictus de Spinoza (1632-77) is concerned with a freedom of an inextricably political kind, founded on a model of empowerment that is mutual, collective, and socially liberatory, for one and all. Spinoza's vision of human freedom unites the self-concerned desires of the individual with the common good of the community in which they live. While there already exists a number of accounts of freedom in Spinoza, be it of the *beatitudo* of the individual in *Ethics*, or the free deliberation of democracy outlined in the TTP, this thesis is the first to identify a consistent preoccupation with the intrinsically social and political basis *of* (and not merely requirements *for*) human freedom in Spinoza's works.

It presents a new argument for freedom in Spinoza as something *viable* for all human beings, being a way of life wherein individuals become as knowledgeable as they can, usefully assist each other, enjoy each other's company and live well, collectively. Yet it also explores Spinoza's own ambivalence about the difficulties facing such a joyous image of freedom. In developing Spinoza's questions about servitude, harmful ideas, akrasia, and desire's non-morally normative nature, the thesis assesses the challenges that threaten to destabilise a community's striving for its common good into debilitating superstition, tyranny, and fear. It intervenes into a lively debate about the politically liberatory use of Spinoza's thought, making the argument that the individual's lasting freedom must be realised through empowering others to live as reasonably as they can, using a mixture of affective, imaginative and cognitive means to increase the capabilities of one and all. Such a freedom is realised not merely at the level of personal relationships but through the transformation of political and social institutions. At the heart of this thorny problem of human freedom is the concept of *collective* desire, which the thesis presents as a new tool,

discerned in Spinoza's underdeveloped thoughts about collective power, to address key problems in contemporary political thought around protest and rebellion, the state, populism and democracy.

The thesis establishes its argument through a detailed textual analysis of the *Theological-Political Treatise* (1670), the *Ethics* (1677) and the *Political Treatise* (1677), sensitive to Spinoza's Latin terminology and to developments and differences in his thought across those works. It presents a new conceptual framework to explore empowerment through collectivity, commonality, unanimity and interdependence – the affective, imaginative and societal structures in which individuals identify each other as of a common nature, and so join forces together and act, think and interact in ways that realise their mutual advantage. By *empowerment* I mean the capability of an individual to self-determine their actions and ideas as much as they possibly can. By *individual* I refer to a particular human being. Given my concern with collectivity, by *collective individuation* I refer to the process by which a number of individuals identify, think or act as one, as part of a single group or community. My argument is grounded in the premise that the individual is already an 'ensemble of social relations' as Marx puts it (1998, 570), and the thesis explores in particular the internal structures of individuation, by way of desire, imagination and emotions.

My attention to collective individuation shares common ground with recent theoretical interest (Simondon, 1989; Balibar, 1997b; Read, 2016) in the concept of 'transindividuality', that is, the processes by which an individual is constituted (and in turn constitutes) a collective, a process which is never-ending and always incomplete. While certainly not the first to address Spinoza's interest in the social and relational nature of human freedom, my analysis of the relationship between desire and politics, and its importance for Spinoza, contributes a new understanding of the inextricable connection

between freedom of an individual and collective or, we might say, ethical and political, kind. While my initial interest in Spinoza's relevance to contemporary thought was piqued by what is now sometimes called the 'Spinozan Turn' in France,¹ particularly the Spinozism of Gilles Deleuze, the thesis departs from this tradition through three premises: first, that Spinoza's thinking about human freedom and power develops over the course of his major works with significant shifts that require a more nuanced, textually-determined and contextual account. Second, that while *Ethics* has justifiably been given far more attention to derive a metaphysical account of freedom, the TTP and often-overlooked TP provide a robust and compelling politics of freedom. Third, that Spinoza's thought is not consistently liberatory. As I will argue instead, there are a number of contradictions regarding popular capability that cannot be so easily transposed onto subsequent political contexts.

That it is not to discount these readings, far from it: an underlying aim of the thesis is to draw together the best of these politically liberatory readings of Spinoza so as to derive a coherent and applicable political theory independent of it. For the proliferation of quasi-Spinozan concepts of 'desire', the 'affects' and the 'multitude' into critical theory via Deleuze and Negri particularly has brought a new set of enthusiastic readers to Spinoza, and opened up new ways of thinking about his politics. But in their haste to apply a model of desire as wholly liberatory, or revolutionary multitudes, or 'affects of capitalism' to the 21st century, there results in what Spinoza would call a 'confused and mutilated' account of his work.²

¹ A misnomer given the apparent unity it confers over a politically diverse and extensive tradition, but a useful one for grouping together a certain 'air' of May 1968 in these readings, as Negri puts it (2004, 113): Gueroult, Matheron and Deleuze are usually considered of this tradition, all producing landmark studies in 1968-9. Althusser is unfairly omitted, though Peden, 2014 has restored his significance, alongside Cavailles, Desanti and Alquié. Macherey, Balibar, Negri, Tosel and Albiac are often considered 'descendants' (e.g. Montag and Stolze, 1997, Read, 2007, Ruddick, 2010, Williams, 2012), but this is to over-simplify what are diverse contextual, political and interpretive positions. James (2005, 100-12) gives an excellent survey of Althusser's Spinozism as continuous with a longer 'materialist tradition'. For a more critical view of these 'neo-Spinozisms', see Kordela (2007, 3-5).

² Deleuze's *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy* (1970) and Negri's *Savage Anomaly* (1981) have been particularly influential in Anglophone critical theory since their translations (1988/1991 respectively). Accounts which uncritically present aspects of Deleuze and Negri's Spinozism as if it were Spinoza include, to my mind, Del Lucchese, 2009, Ruddick, 2010, Casarino, 2011, and Janik, 2012. On the

Again, that is not to discourage polemic or heresy – my concern is rather that there is a great deal more that is useful in his thought that remains occluded by selective readings, poor translations and an ‘inadequate’ (in the Spinozan sense of not self-determined) reliance on secondary interpretations.

Hence the thesis’ treatment of these elementary conceptual matters is intended to have a bearing on the foundations of these debates, while avoiding a lengthy detour in historically and politically accounting for them. Such a task has been accomplished by others, and the great virtue of the current vitality of Spinoza scholarship means that such a commentary would soon be out of date.³ In arguing instead for an intrinsic model of becoming-freer which is also a becoming-collective in Spinoza’s thought, the thesis instead offers a new and more secure foundation for conceiving the individual’s freedom, the common good and collective’s desire as all, broadly, apiece. Its fundamental concern is with collectivity, and it uses Spinoza’s own observations and underdeveloped ideas on this to outline a more robust foundation for thinking collective political subjectivity in general.

This thesis appears at a pivotal juncture in Spinoza scholarship, one in which excellent research in Spinoza’s politics, ethics, epistemology and historical context have become increasingly oblivious of each other. There is a danger in emulating Odysseus in striving to return home to an ‘uncontaminated’ reading of Spinoza, thereby plugging one’s ears to the

affects of capitalism, I am thinking of Massumi (e.g. 1992, 122-8), Hardt and Negri (2000, 2004), Latour, 2014, and indirectly, London, 2014.

³ Again, Peden, 2014 particularly, but in an obverse sense Noys (2010, Introduction), who excoriates contemporary critical theory for a prevailing ‘affirmationism’, that is, an incoherent affirmation of joy in itself, one he derives partly from the influence of Spinoza. While the thesis is sympathetic to some of Noys’ concerns, particularly a methodological one of how we read Spinoza, he does not account for why joyous affects are necessarily more empowering than sad affects, and why one should seek to organise a politics around it. As E3p11-p12 indicate, affects of joy correlate to a transition to a state of greater power, and when the mind imagines what causes it joy, it results in an increase in the body’s power of acting. Such an insight merits deeper reflection in Leftist thought, given that a reliance on sad passions to organise protest can only be weakly empowering (fear or hatred of a greater evil can motivate individuals to act, but they will sooner be convinced by hope, reasonable or not). Regarding critical panoramas, I am thinking particularly of Duffy (2009), whose excellent survey of the field is now obsolete.

temptations of debating with the Sirens, be they doing Leftist politics in France, archival historicism in the Netherlands, or epistemological and close textual analysis in North America.⁴ Since Bennett's rapid, cavalier dismissal of Wolfson's dense contextualist method ('the labour and learning are awesome, but the *philosophical* profit is almost nil': 1984, §3.5), it has become common to consider Spinoza's epistemology detached from his politics or historical context. Huenemann (2014) warns of the limits of this 'collegial approach', where scholars subject the 'Great Ones' of philosophy to the same critique and reconstructive defence as one's own colleagues, placing questions or thoughts into their minds that they could not have possibly entertained. The thesis does not seek to purge Spinoza of his contradictions or defend him against an array of excellent, meticulous, collegial criticism. But in seeking to bring together diverse traditions and readings on the common ground of empowerment, I will also argue that there is a consistent if multi-faceted argument for human freedom of an ethical and political character, just as it is of an individual and collective nature.

At the same time, I seek to avoid what Melamed rightly castigates as making Spinoza 'one of us' (2013a), an untimely and anomalous modern who shares our ideas and values. In turning to Spinoza to find a precursor, there is a danger of letting him off the hook, in taking what is most modern in his thought at the expense of what is more difficult or contrary, or questions of his method in writing *for* human freedom amid very different intellectual and

⁴ I am thinking of a number of recent essay collections: Koistinen and Biro (2002), Koistinen (2009), Melamed and Rosenthal (2010), and Della Rocca (forthcoming), which include nothing on the rich contributions to Spinoza's political theory being made by more radical theorists; Kisner and Youpa (2014) do not include questions of context and influence in Spinoza's ethical theory; and Montag and Stolze (1997), Gatens (2009c), Vardoulakis (2011) and Lord (2012) do not communicate with the vital, meticulous analytic work being undertaken in North America. Van Bunge et al. (2011) is a welcome exception to this trend, so too a small number of monographs and articles, including Balibar (2008), Steinberg (2009), Viljanen (2011), Sharp (2011), and James (2012). That Frank and Waller (2016) offer a guide to Spinoza's politics that includes no discussion of Deleuze, Negri, Balibar or Matheron (let alone Aristotle, the De la Courts or the 'Radical Enlightenment' hypothesis) is an unfortunate oversight. One must look back to Curley and Moreau (1990) for the last rich and sustained inter-hermeneutic conversation on Spinoza.

political references to ours. In deriving a liberatory politics from his works, the thesis seeks to avoid considering Spinoza apart from his context, thereby ‘discovering’ what can only be anachronistic concepts (for instance egoism, communism, feminism, radical democracy, and so forth). I will however argue that there *is* a coherent politics of collectivity, unanimity and collegial deliberation across Spinoza’s thought, and one that can illuminate theories of collective action and democracy today.

The arguments of the thesis are arranged into five chapters, gridded against the conceptual problem of freedom. I begin with servitude, under the critical premise that any philosophical commonplace like the mind’s freedom being through contemplating truths is insubstantial, unless it can also account for why minds are not free, what their servitude consists of, and what prevents human beings from easily achieving such a freedom. The first chapter is principally concerned with the TTP, and will distinguish six facets of servitude in Spinoza, defined as a state of being possessed by harmful ideas. It will account for it as both an internal state and a more extensive one than traditional readings admit, and observes its links to fortune, superstition, and to political domination. Servitude is a state where disempowerment is made meaningful and rewarding, rather than intolerable, and this problem is used to connect ethical freedom to political rights. Engaging with recent interest in Spinoza and the concept of ‘voluntary servitude’ (Lordon, Abensour), the chapter distinguishes a generic affective *servitude* from political *domination*, and accounts for the affective and imaginative structures of being dominated by another’s desire. It presents a critical theory of servitude, and constructs the core problem of the thesis as one of power, by way of natural right. It explores the hitherto-underappreciated significance of the three political laws of TTP’s Chapter 16, and presents a close textual study of Spinoza’s terminology for group and collective subjects, drawing out implications about the epistemological-political nature of obedience and empowerment that inform the entire thesis.

In Chapter 2 I turn to the *Ethics*, and over a sustained and systematic investigation into human power, present and resolve some interpretive issues around the conatus doctrine. I distinguish freedom from power, and within this, *potentia* from *potestas*, and present these as two facets in the individual's becoming freer. Over the course of the chapter, I am determined to give a meaningful and practical account of human freedom, one that avoids empty tautologies like 'power makes things more powerful', or which places freedom beyond the reach of most human beings. I will argue for a more inclusive model of empowerment, one that is relative rather than exclusively adequate, and measurable in degrees. I separate conatus from desire, defining the latter as a specific kind of consciousness constituted by an 'environment' of associated ideas within the individual's mind around a given appetite and its likely corresponding affects.

I will argue that what matters most is not what a given desire is, but what it *does*. Neither desire nor the affect of joy intrinsically correlate with actual self-preservation, but are best realised through it, providing a new criterion to think freedom through desire. I explore the weaknesses of Spinoza's own account through a number of critical interpretations, using the problems of teleology, akrasia and the affects of desire to question, explore and expand on Spinoza's initial positions. I then conclude with five sub-claims appended to my reconstructed model of Spinozan desire, regarding the maximisation of joys through the re-programming of desires, and I will draw attention to the fundamental importance of interrelationality in becoming freer, in recognising and utilising our relations with others to collectively become as self-determining as we can.

I then develop and apply a concept of *unanimity* in Spinoza's thought in Chapter 3. It will be introduced as a tendency or hypothesis in his accounts of sociality and individuation in *Ethics*, in which individuals are conatively compelled to associate with one another, and find in reason the most reliable and effective common ground in doing so. It is worth noting

that my presentation of 'collective' is no lazy neologism for what others might call 'political': the collective precedes the political as an intrinsic model of association, I argue, one that is more flexible and universal than its specifically political manifestation. It also suggests a model of empowerment as absolute collective right which in the TTP is called 'democracy' but which by the TP becomes much more restrictive. Across the thesis, I offer a cautious argument as to why Spinoza's politics do not always conform to the universal, inclusive model of democracy some of his readers hope for.

I am particularly interested in the role of the imagination in enabling individuals to recognise who is of a common nature, the basis by which they are useful to each other (E4p18s). I will call this subjective, imaginative faculty *commonality*. I will also account for the socially instrumental use of the imagination in cohering societies through Spinoza's account of the prophet, and will assess whether his example of the Hebrew Republic is an exemplary model of communal freedom, or an elitist warning about slavery. Indeed, by the close of Chapter 3 I bring together a diverse range of readers of the TTP on this charge, using the universal faith to raise pertinent interpretive questions around socio-political contexts, and the instrumental role of reasonable imaginaries. Aided by Balibar's communication thesis, I explore the extent to which a collective group can be unified, reasonable and joyous, without becoming stultified by conformity. I then present some implications of my arguments for recent philosophical research in collective intentionality.

I then turn to Spinoza's *Political Treatise* in Chapter 4, arguing for its significance and distinctiveness in Spinoza's philosophy. I present issues of context and new influences, particularly Aristotle and Machiavelli, and address how it responds to structural weaknesses in Spinoza's earlier accounts of free will, religion and democracy in the TTP. I identify Spinoza's aim as an attempt to describe a reasonable republic, that is, an optimum state whose foundation and laws are strictly, scientifically reasonable, and I critically assess how

Spinoza attempts to load the burden of becoming freer onto the state itself. I will also identify how the work is riven by a number of structural contradictions which make its politics of unanimity and popular sovereignty unsound. In his attempt to make politics reasonable, Spinoza leaves behind its subject, the self-determining collective who desire freedom, and the collective imaginaries needed to animate such a desire. The limits of his model illuminate the path ahead for outlining a liberatory collective political subject.

Can Spinoza's politics allow for a coherent theory of rebellion? Chapter 5 will begin with this difficult but fundamental question for instigating political change, like the kind suggested in the TP. Though I will find little in the text to warrant such a reading, I explore one opportunity raised by Matheron regarding 'indignation', and I will advance my own argument for rebellion consistent with his model of freedom via emulation. I use the remainder of the chapter to complete my outline of collective desire, drawing on an array of philosophers and political theorists to explore the role of consciousness, interdependence, and political organisation. I will elaborate a new conception of common sense through Gramsci and Reich, and establish an argument for democratic social responsibility as a worthwhile aim for political movements, making as many as capable as they can to think for themselves, recognise their common good, and organise together in effective political movements that can realise this, politically. A freedom for one and all.

The lasting contribution that this thesis seeks to establish is a model of how freedom should be understood. So often conceived as something *within* autonomous individuals, my argument wishes to restore significance to another feature, that of freedom *among* individuals, freedom as something conditional and realised through our relations with others. I do not claim that this is the sole freedom Spinoza had in mind, but I do seek to contribute the argument that it is the most important. A freedom not merely of conviviality and friendship, *laetitia* and *hilaritas* multiplied, but of collectively becoming the best that

we can be. A becoming that is dynamic and open-ended, but which supplies enough information to ascertain and realise the good life, collectively.

Chapter 1. The Politics of Servitude

§1.1 Introduction

Spinoza's works share a consistent concern with the freedom of human beings, and he is not the first to identify this freedom in the mind's contemplation of universal truths, the profound happiness or blessedness (*beatitudo*) resulting from the intellectual love of God. What I propose to be more challenging and interesting about his thought is its account of *servitude*, that is, the state of being subject to a more powerful force, and thus lacking the ability to self-determine one's actions or ideas. Is servitude a descriptor of a universal feature of our human vulnerability to the passive affects (London, 2014, 17), or does it reflect an active force, a 'contre-*conatus*' (Abensour, 2015, §19) deployed by state authorities to stunt their subjects' desires for freedom? Does our inability to think or act reasonably reflect a degree of complicity, if not desire on our part, as la Boétie claims (2012), and Lordon (2014) more recently applies to Spinoza, or can we agree with F Proust (1997, 16) that such a 'voluntarism' in servitude is absurd?

In this chapter, I will argue that the problem of servitude is an intrinsically political one for Spinoza, reflecting both a problem for politics (devising stratagems for securing popular obedience to public laws) and a problem for freedom-loving individuals (acquiring knowledge and being the cause of joyous affects cannot be accomplished alone). I undertake a lateral study of the politics of servitude in Spinoza, focused primarily on the TTP. I consider this problem instrumental for understanding some of the more unfamiliar and original aspects of his account of political freedom, and will determine over the course of this

chapter and the next its bearing on desire, being not so much a negative or anti-desire as a debilitating re-programming of it by authorities, but one in which we can learn a good deal about how desires are instrumental in becoming free.

While this chapter is concerned with outlining the thesis' core problem, and to that end holds back from proposing too many new concepts until the next chapter, it should be appreciated that its lateral and specific interest in servitude is an unfamiliar one to TTP scholarship or Spinoza studies more broadly, aside from a small number of readers interested in TTP pref.10's brief comment on voluntary servitude, evaluated in §1.2.3. Its method, that of meticulous textual analysis, also yields original findings about obedience, servitude, and collective agency. In demonstrating the centrality of the problem of servitude by way of the affects, imagination, and desire, the chapter in turn establishes the critical agenda for the remainder of the thesis.

The chapter is structured as follows: it begins with an extensive sectional study of servitude (§1.2), aided by Abensour's recent argument for a voluntary servitude 'hypothesis' at work in Spinoza (2015, §18).⁵ This enables me to complete much of the chapter's core conceptual work, identifying an affective servitude of the mind to harmful ideas (§1.2.1), through which I develop a critical theory of servitude (§1.2.2), and account for its voluntary aspects (§1.2.3). Equipped with a testable definition of servitude, I then pass to Spinoza's political naturalism of Chapter 16 (§1.3), assessing 'natural right' – its account of transferring one's right or being under the right of another – and its implications for the TTP's earlier concerns about active/passive servitude. Remaining with Chapter 16, I then draw attention to the hitherto under-addressed significance of three occurrences of *lex* (§1.4). Terming these three political laws, I assess their significance for desire, freedom and the greater good

⁵ Abensour terms it 'l'hypothèse laboétienne', and has written elsewhere of the 'voluntary servitude hypothesis' (2011, 330) as a broader issue for political philosophy. Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* is the first in this tradition to identify 'voluntary servitude' as a problem in Spinoza (2013a, 42); for more recent observations, evaluated in §1.2.2, see Balibar, 1997, 186, and Lordon, 2014, 13.

of collectivising one's powers. Turning to the subject of servitude, the *vulgus* (§1.5), I develop an internal criterion of activity-empowerment for group subjects. In §1.6.1 I evaluate recent accounts of the internal experience of this servitude, what Lordon describes as 'enlistment' (*enrôlement*: 2014, 3-4), before outlining the pre-eminence of reason in political consent (§1.6.2). The conclusion raises critical issues for free will and desire that lead into the next chapter.

§1.2 What is Servitude?

Spinoza presents the problem of servitude forcefully in two key locations in the Preface of the TTP, sections 1 and 10. The latter location has often been studied at the expense of the former, as it is where Spinoza raises in all but name la Boétie and his concept of 'voluntary servitude' in describing how, in monarchies, subjects 'fight for their servitude [*pro servitio*] as if for salvation' (TTP pref.10).⁶ There are good reasons for considering this usage most significant, and I will explore the rich debate around this in §1.2.3, but I wish to turn first to another kind of servitude, one that is easily conflated with the political sort just described. We will need to separate the two if we are to adequately determine the nature of political agency and obedience as being explained from, but not necessarily reducible to, our natural vulnerability to sad passive affects.⁷ In this way we will be able to recognise and distinguish harmful desires from empowering ones, using a simple schema for servitude (§1.2.2) by which to cut through the confusion around the voluntary servitude hypothesis.

§1.2.1 Harmful Ideas

Across the TTP one can trace an invective against the danger of the *vulgus* ('rabble', 'common people') to the stability of the state, and the *vulgus* is often anthropomorphised

⁶ The only recurrence of *pro servitio* in the *Opera* is TP 8.9, describing soldiers' military service.

⁷ By *affects* I follow Spinoza's definition, being defined as the mind's ideas of the modifications or affections of the body, which involve an increase or decrease in its power of acting (E3df3, 3p11).

and dramatised into an unsteady, irrational and foolish antagonist of politics.⁸ The ‘constancy of the *vulgus* is obstinacy’ he remarks, in a fashion indicative of the rest, ‘and that they are not governed by reason but swayed by impulse in approving or finding fault’ (pref.15).⁹ But elsewhere in the same preface, Spinoza suggests that few if any humans are actually governed by reason, and it is initially unclear what his critique of the *vulgus* is supposed to amount to.

This is particularly so at the very beginning of the TTP, which by nature of its location is easily overlooked. ‘If men were always able to regulate their affairs with sure judgment,’ Spinoza writes, ‘or if fortune always smiled upon them, they would not get caught up in any superstition’ (pref.1).¹⁰ Moreau locates a ‘critical theory of fortune’ in Spinoza’s remark (1997, 103), yet fortune – such a significant, autonomous ‘goddess’ for Machiavelli, a notion influential across Renaissance humanism – seldom recurs in the TTP. For it is neither fortune nor superstition that cause servitude in themselves, rather both are effects of it. The TTP and *Ethics* are clear in assigning its emergence and influence in the affects of hope and fear, to which superstition offers refuge, albeit an ‘asylum of ignorance’ (E1app), and Spinoza’s critique of superstition rages across TTP’s preface (particularly pref.1-5). If humans were able to effectively live according to reason, or were never troubled by adverse circumstances, then they would experience neither hope nor fear, which is to say, an ‘inconstant joy [or sadness], arising from the image of a thing future or past, of whose outcome we are in doubt’ (E3p18s2). Instead, hope and fear consign us to passivity, vacillating between uncertain affects while remaining attached to ideas and desires beyond our control. These states of confusion arise from fundamentally natural circumstances: what compels us into the

⁸ I account for Spinoza’s terminology for group subjects in §1.5, with a table recording uses and meanings which the reader may find helpful to consult at this stage.

⁹ Similar instances appear at TTP 14.1, 17.4 and 18.6. See §1.5 for an assessment of his terminology.

¹⁰ Spinoza’s translators follow him in using the gendered term ‘man’ (*homo*) to describe humanity on the whole. Generally I will refer to human beings, using ‘man’ only where quoting Spinoza. This gendered language was a feature of the classic Roman authors from whom Spinoza learnt his Latin, and a prevailing cultural feature of early modern philosophy.

‘asylum of ignorance’ is the inevitability of fear, sadness and vacillation when, under the force of our appetites, we confuse effects with final causes, what Matheron calls a ‘finalism’ (1969, 107; cf. Read 2016, 22), rendering us vulnerable to the grossest anthropomorphic delusions. It is within this passivity in disempowerment that the conditions for servitude emerge.

Whereas fortune locates real agency outside human control, Spinoza is throughout the TTP and *Ethics* more interested in what human beings can themselves take care of. The title of Part 4 of the *Ethics* spells out the extent of the problem, ‘Of human servitude, or the strength of the affects’, and the first line of its preface begins with a ‘war cry’ of its own (Deleuze, 1990, 225), that ‘Man’s lack of power to moderate and restrain the affects I call servitude’. Servitude connotes a lack of power to moderate strong affects, but this does not mean strong joyous affects (unless it is titillation (*titillatio*), which in pleasing one part of the body over others, destabilises its proportion of motion-and-rest, and so causes harm: 4p43), and Spinoza writes elsewhere that cheerfulness or desires arising from reason can never be excessive (4p42, 4p61). Those affects whose strength needs restraining are those that determine us to think or act in ways harmful to ourselves or others. These are most likely to be sad passive affects – ideas of the body’s affections as it undergoes a transition to lesser power – and of these disempowering states Spinoza particularly has in mind hatred and fear. But he writes of the affects in general, and were his intention simply to affirm the good of joy in itself, *Ethics* might conclude with its affirmation of friendship, theatre and green plants (4p45s), rather than the *beatitudo* of the mind in adequate ideas. Instead, its ethical prescriptions recognise a freedom of the mind achieved through moderating the affects, without being simply equivalent to that.

It is too early yet to reflect on what this might mean for *voluntary servitude*, that is, one’s complicity in or desire for one’s disempowerment, but we can identify what such

servitude is not. I wish to briefly indicate here why this servitude is not one of ‘passionate servitude’ per se, a claim made by Lordon (2014, 16-7, 74) that human beings live in a kind of universal servitude to all affects, or that Spinoza’s later treatment of the affects prescribes overcoming them altogether for the *apatheia* of the mind (cf. §2.5.2). Rather, we are in servitude to the extent that our affects determine our behaviour and mental states in such a way that we do not act reasonably, which is to say, in a manner that aids our self-preservation. This servitude is not merely an affective, or cognitive (or political, or social) sort then, but refers to a general state in which the subject is disempowered in such a way that they are overwhelmed by ideas harmful to them. In order to become free of such servitude, we must draw on the aid of reason to regulate the power of their affects, no longer captive to the uncertainty of fluctuating ‘wretchedly between hope and fear’ as the TTP memorably begins (pref.1), but neither expecting to be free of them altogether.¹¹

§1.2.2 A Critical Theory of Servitude

One should note how sparingly but decisively *servit-* (incorporating various declensions of *servitudo*, as well as *servus*, slave) appears in Spinoza’s works, and its differing uses. Aside from making the title of Part 4, and appearing briefly as a ‘war-cry’ in its preface to describe the power of harmful affects, we find it in only three other places in *Ethics*, and with another meaning. These differing meanings illuminate the precise nature of this weakened passivity. For E2p49s dismisses as false belief the apparent ‘servitude’ of obeying God’s commands as a necessary burden for attaining the riches of the afterlife; it later appears again as a false impression of harmony produced by flattery (4app21). It is used lastly at 5p41s, describing again the false hopes of those who follow moral codes so as ‘to receive a reward for their servitude [*servitutis*]’ (5p41s). It presents a mistaken belief of believers who experience what

¹¹ Kisner (2011, 23) presents a similar claim in regard to the possibility of adequate knowledge. See §2.3 for a sustained assessment of the affects and adequate ideas.

ought to be empowering and joyous – the knowledge and love of Spinoza’s God, resulting in a rigorous ethics – as a great burden. Being attached to this false burden, a doctrine that makes their passivity meaningful rather than intolerable, seems to Spinoza as actual servitude. For now, I will define these different uses, then propose a reassembly at the end: thus s_1 refers to the mind’s inability to restrain the affects (Part 4, and also our earlier remarks on the TTP in §1.2.1); and s_2 describes the influence of a false belief, of a largely but not exclusively religious sort.

In the same scholium of 5p41, Spinoza adds that they would ‘prefer to govern all their actions according to lust, and to obey fortune rather than themselves’, a very similar definition to that discussed in TTP pref.1. In the first instance of servitude in E2p49s, we also find in the following sentence the first use of fortune in *Ethics* (‘matters of fortune, *or* things which are not in our power’). They are linked in Spinoza’s mind, if not yet explicitly, fortune referring to a false refuge for individuals, disempowered and vulnerable because of their lack of capability to resist harmful ideas. Returning to 4pref, we observe the same thing: in the following sentence after the definition of *servitutem*, fortune appears – ‘the man who is subject to affects is under the control, not of himself, but of fortune’ (cf. 5p20s) – which is to say, of nothing. Or, more precisely, not of *nothing*, but of an inadequate belief which makes this nothing into something, a domain of supernatural forces, one whose belief only further disposes the hapless individual to further actions or ideas that harm her/himself or others. Later, the one who ‘conquers’ others using love over hate ‘requires the least help from fortune’ (4p46s), suggesting the two stand in polar relation – fortune indicating a lack of power, whereas reason ‘conquers fortune’ (4p47s), indicating the route to empowerment. Spinoza’s definition of fortune in the TTP is even more wry: ‘the direction of God inasmuch as he governs human affairs through external and unforeseen causes’ (TTP 3.3.), a commonplace belief but an absurd one by his reasoning. This does not yet affect our

two definitions, but suggests that both fortune and s_2 arise from s_1 . It also suggests that fortune's antonym, reason, involves aspects of capability and responsibility.¹²

Definitions of servitude expand in the TTP: prejudices about religion are vestiges of our 'ancient servitude' (pref.8), and there are theologians who seek to use these for 'bringing all back into servitude again' (ibid.). This would seem to apply to Dutch servitude under Spanish monarchical Habsburg rule, but Spinoza leaves this vague enough to facilitate multiple interpretations: for now, it is s_3 . A more common definition is the slavery of the Hebrews under the Egyptians (2.15, 5.11, 6.13, and annotation 16), and is s_4 . Thus s_3 and s_4 seem to correlate to actual political servitude of the Dutch and the Hebrews.¹³ Yet Spinoza also describes as *servitude* passive obedience to biblical laws which Jesus Christ frees all from so that they can follow these with a free mind (3.10, 4.10), and 17.25 also describes the Hebrews' obedience to the laws as appearing more freedom than servitude. We can already notice similarities with s_2 , but given its distinctiveness I term this s_5 , that of passively obeying moral codes ignorant of their nature and good. There are also instances which reiterate the definitions of *Ethics*: that the 'true life, worship and love of God seemed more servitude than true freedom' (2.15) under Moses' laws, referring to false belief, s_2 . Lastly, 'slavery to the flesh or [*sive*] an inconstant and wavering mind' (4.6) repeats that of s_1 , of a given mind's inability to control its affects.

These five instances amount to a consistency though not uniformity of use, one we could describe as the rule of unreason. In each case, minds are dominated by inadequate and harmful beliefs that they are not the cause of, and which determine them to think and act in ways harmful to their own being. They correlate to disempowerment, but should not be reduced to it, for in servitude is a refuge in false belief: from the apparent good of

¹² This point has a bearing on my later account of *potentia* and *potestas* in §2.3.2.

¹³ Perhaps intentionally: in §3.4 I will explore why the Hebrew Republic was considered an exemplar for the United Provinces, framing their own national imaginary.

unmoderated affects and the harmful desires or dependencies these give rise to (s_1), to being in thrall to false beliefs about God, or our own good (s_2). The servitude of the Dutch (s_3) and Hebrews (s_4) refers to a more elementary lack of capability to think and act reasonably under political domination – thus, in the latter case, the Hebrews were unable to form a democracy as they lacked sufficient reason (5.10). While Moses ultimately prescribes reasonable laws and a social contract mostly founded on their common good (cf. §3.4), the divided sovereignty of their state leaves it fatally compromised (cf. §3.4), and the Hebrews come to experience their laws as a burden, being passively compelled to obey them without realising their fundamental benefit (s_5), which ultimately weakens their state. Again, their servitude describes the rule of harmful ideas. In all cases except s_1 , it is attached to debilitating political consequences.

One may wonder where the late TP fits into this schema: I analyse its differences with the other two texts later in §4.2, but for now we can note a supplementary definition that illuminates the rest. As well as ‘giving licence to one’s appetites’, and being under their control rather than ‘the rule of reason’ (TP 2.20), akin to s_1 , it otherwise consistently refers to an explicitly political servitude (s_6), like that of s_3 and s_4 . There is the servitude of the Ottomans, transferring all power to one man (6.4; cf. 7.27); the danger of servitude under popular military dictators (7.17); the servitude of a state which conceals its affairs from its people (7.29; cf. 8.6); as well the ‘symbols of servitude’ of statues and honorific titles (10.8). Given that the TP is premised on a theory of popular sovereignty as a political good, the *servitudo* of the state is actually that of the subjects’ minds, unable to think adequately or as guided by reason to their common good, and instead being in awe to compelling though harmful ideas that actually perpetuate their disempowerment.

This notion of being so dominated that one cannot think for oneself is also what Spinoza refers to in his use of ‘slave’, presented either in contrast to the free man in *Ethics*

(E4p66) or as the subjects of a state that demands they transfer the entirety of their right, including that of thinking for themselves (TTP 16.10). It describes an internal state effected by an external force. While Spinoza captures all these terms under *servitudo*, and we can now recognise a criterion of (dis)empowerment in each, we will lose the specificity of their meanings unless we determine how a given state of disempowerment results in domination by others through harmful ideas. When Spinoza writes that the ‘prejudices’ surrounding religion might be appropriated by ambitious men ‘to win the allegiance of the multitudes [*multitudinis*], still in thrall to pagan superstition, with the aim of bringing all back into servitude again’ (pref.8), the servitude he refers to is not of being under monarchical rule (contra Abensour, 2015, §9) or theocratic rule per se – rather, this servitude is a collective state of disempowerment, which is then used by religious and political authorities to establish social obedience. Hence the *vulgus* share in a kind of servitude without being what we would term ‘slaves’: they are a group of (common) individuals who become a subject through their servitude to harmful ideas. In this sense it is less a socio-political category, more an epistemological one, as Balibar rightly notes (1994, 11). The *vulgus* exist in a state of epistemic servitude, striving to interpret the world according to inadequate ideas about freedom, God or nature, and desire – the harmful ideas or ‘finalism’ of §1.2.1. This state arises from fundamental affective, conative and imaginative features of human life – what Saar calls a shared ‘existential structure of uncertainty’ (2015, 123).

More excavation work is needed to substantiate this epistemological-political account of servitude, which will be carried out over the chapter, and Spinoza’s complex account of religion and the imagination will be returned to in Chapter 3. For now, we can note that Spinoza’s interest in tackling superstition and subjecting scripture to the ‘natural light of reason’ (pref.10) is akin to his method in Part 4 of *Ethics*, ascertaining the causes of a given passivity to a harmful idea and establishing reasonable principles by which to restrict and overcome their power. But this is by no means the only *servitudo* Spinoza has in mind. From

the foregoing discussion, we can offer an initial definition of servitude as being passively determined by one's ideas to act or think in ways that are harmful to oneself. This definition is internal and correlates more to what we would now term 'ignorance'; one could also criticise it for effectively blaming those in servitude for their own condition, *volunteering* or willing it even. We therefore need to proceed quickly onto the role of political authorities in realising relations that result in servitude.

§1.2.3 Secrets of Government

The TTP's stated purpose is to demonstrate that 'freedom to philosophise may not only be allowed without danger to piety and the stability of the republic but cannot be refused without destroying the peace of the republic and piety itself' (TTP, title-page). Freedom is its goal, understood as 'the liberty to judge for oneself' (pref.8), like that enjoyed in the Dutch United Provinces – so Spinoza appeals to his readers. Its obstacle is 'seditious' theologians (pref.7), those who prevent individuals from increasing their ability to think freely, and whose influence over the government threatens to collapse the state. This freedom connotes an ability, but also a liberty, a kind of permission granted to be able to do something self-directed and empowering. This freedom is one that will aid the state by increasing its subjects' capabilities, who will in turn participate freely and usefully within it. If our initial definition is correct however, it would suggest that Spinoza is now about to embark on a work of popular enlightenment.¹⁴ However it is the theologians and supporters of monarchy that he targets. By thriving on the general servitude of the *vulgus*, they in turn perpetuate it, with catastrophic results. As he argues,

¹⁴ Spinoza's friends Meyer, Adriaan Koerbagh and Van den Enden all incorporate aspects or methods of what Israel calls 'popular enlightenment' (2001, 177), for instance writing in Dutch to debunk arcane theological terms. Spinoza's method is notably more cautious, and he warns against the *vulgus* reading his work (TTP pref.15). See Israel, 2001, chs. 9-11.

It may indeed be the highest secret of monarchical government and utterly essential to it, to keep men deceived, and to disguise the fear that sways them with the specious name of religion, so that they will fight for their servitude as if for salvation (pref.10)

Though influenced by classic critiques of superstition by Quintus Curtius and Lucretius, Spinoza intended to startle the liberal, republican supporters of their state's government under De Witt, whose survival by 1670 depended on wresting political influence away from the organised Counter-Remonstrant Calvinists allied with the monarchical Orangist party.¹⁵ Yet the concerns Spinoza presented were more disturbing than their initial anti-monarchical and anti-theological implications. Its analysis of the mechanisms of political states that must necessarily utilise forms of institutional, imaginary and affective bonds as deceptive devices to preserve the state's security, its secret of government, its very *reason*, may have troubled republican regents like De Witt.¹⁶ Indeed later, as we outline in Chapter 3, Spinoza's analysis of the Hebrew Republic ultimately finds that its religion is a historically-contingent assemblage produced *for* their state's uniformity and continuity. Again, a state's reason is its self-preservation (as the TTP's title-page hints), and its rationality is the various mechanisms that are deployed, consciously or not, and usually not, towards its preservation.

But what does this indicate about the kinds of *activity* in the statement above, and how does it illuminate our problem of servitude? If individuals freely fight for their masters, and demonstrate some activity or willing in doing this, is it not condescending to describe their condition as servitude? We need to account for this activity carefully. Fear 'sways' these men, and 'they will fight' in response. Whereas Deleuze and Guattari and London tend

¹⁵ For a historical assessment of the TTP's context, see Petry, 1984, Israel, 2001, ch. 16, Malcolm, 2002, 44-52, and especially James, 2012, ch. 1. Given our later interest in collectivity and sociality, it is worth noting that Spinoza's network of friends introduced him to some of this material. His friend Glazemaker translated into Dutch Quintus Curtius (James, 2012, 19), while Van Berckel was translating into Dutch Hobbes' *Leviathan* during the composition of the TTP, and likely discussed it with Spinoza (Malcolm, 2002, 391).

¹⁶ Spinoza's earliest biographer Lucas initiated the myth that Spinoza received favourable patronage from De Witt. Nadler (1999, 259) and Israel (2001, 277) draw on archival evidence suggesting Spinoza's support for democracy and unconventional views on God may have actually alienated him.

to read this passage quickly, finding evidence of voluntary servitude or enlisted desires and moving on, Abensour astutely observes a tension or ‘juxtaposition’ (2015, §§5-8) in the above passage between two agents, if they may be called that. There is monarchical government which, in contrast to the ‘free republic’ (*libera republica*), uses religion to exploit human servitude to harmful ideas into a powerful and persuasive political ideology. There is also a second agent, these men who actively fight for their servitude under kings and priests. Spinoza will later call this a state of ‘deception’ (TTP 16.6, and annotation 32), one that obscures the workings of power over the powerless and, more troublingly, makes them agents in their own subjugation, slaughtering those who they might otherwise find common cause and ally with.

If the voluntary servitude hypothesis can be proven valid then our fledgling theory of servitude will be dashed, for its unstated premise of passivity in disempowerment cannot be squared with activity in self-repression. It also jeopardises a flourishing set of readings of a politically liberatory Spinoza, be it in terms of radical democracy (Saar, 2013), democratic republicanism (Israel, 2001, 262-72), ‘radical cooperation’ (Sharp, 2011, 105), ‘recommune’ (Lordon, 132-3), multitude (Negri, 2003) or, a little more obscurely, molecular desire (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013a), which takes its political source in the ontological features of freedom Spinoza draws out in *Ethics*, but which apply less easily to his two political works. There is a great deal at stake in the voluntary servitude hypothesis.

‘Successful enslavements break the connection between the sad affects of enslavement and the consciousness of being enslaved’, Lordon rightly notes (2014, ix-x). Revolutionary thinkers share a preoccupation in re-establishing this connection by developing consciousness of slavery, resulting in the mind’s motivation to liberate itself. Spinoza differs somewhat by placing the locus of empowerment on reasonable ideas which enable an agent to internally determine their own effects, and become more capable – a

process outlined in the next chapter. Of course, the classic republican critique of monarchy was not unfamiliar at this time – Hobbes remarks that ‘by reading of these Greek, and Latin authors, men have gotten a habit ... of favouring tumults, and of licentious controlling the actions of their sovereigns’ (1998a, XXI.9).¹⁷ It is Spinoza’s location of agency in the dominated which is perhaps more unusual, and has only one well-known precedent. We will first take the above passage as an instance of voluntary servitude, and from there evaluate its role within our emerging schema of empowerment.

La Boétie’s *Discours de la servitude volontaire* was a well-known 16th century anti-tyrannical tract, popular in Spinoza’s own era with French Huguenots.¹⁸ Though we do not know if Spinoza read it, and he does not refer to it, it is not unlikely that he would have known of its startling title, and may have heard its ideas paraphrased by friends in Collegiant circles. In any case, Spinoza’s argument bears a number of important similarities. Though there was an established tradition of tyrannicidal justification since Cicero’s *De republica* going into the early modern era (Cicero, 1999, 29; cf. Brincat, 2008, 214-24), the originality of la Boétie’s argument rests on two counts. A people actively acquiesces and consents to its own subjection in its very behaviour; therefore withdrawing consent through mass civil disobedience is sufficient to overthrow tyranny, ‘like the root when it has no more liquid or food, the branch dries up and dies’ (2012, 6). Spinoza, keen to defend an embattled republican government, is most interested in the first count, and echoes la Boétie’s rage against the responsibility of the commons for their own subjugation. ‘It is the people who enslave themselves’, writes la Boétie, who ‘cut their own throats, when they have the choice

¹⁷ The influence of Greek and Roman political thought on Spinoza and Machiavelli is addressed later in §4.2.2.

¹⁸ On his reception and influence, see Atkinson’s introduction in la Boétie, 2012, xxxiii-xl. Spinoza’s friend Glazemaker translates Montaigne’s works, Israel notes, without giving a date (2001, 170). Glazemaker had actually worked on translating Montaigne’s vast essays into Dutch over 1667-72/4 (there is some dispute as to the actual year of first publication, printed as 1674), overlapping with the TTP. It is possible he would have told Spinoza about the project and remarked on Montaigne’s defence of la Boétie’s freedom-loving tract (cf. Akkerman, 1984, 23-9, Wahrman, 2012, 134).

of being either free men or slaves, give up their freedom and take up the yoke if they accept their ill, or rather pursue it' (2012, 6). 'Anyone with any experience of the capricious mind of the multitudes [*multitudinis*] almost despairs of it', writes Spinoza in a moment of similar pessimism, for from 'pride they condemn their equals, and will not allow themselves to be ruled by them' (TTP 17.4). While extolling a love of political freedom, both la Boétie and Spinoza find themselves alienated from their own people.

Without an effective instance of where free men have not deserted their liberties, la Boétie's analysis tends to fall into a premise that authoritarian political rule is an unfortunate effect of a natural susceptibility to tyranny, to which his exhortations for liberty are offered as a hopeful remedy. He tells us that 'the first reason for voluntary servitude is custom' (2012, 17), but there is nothing in his analysis that suggests how something as universal as custom is transformed to prevent servitude, or, beyond deposing the monarch, what political forms might enable popular freedom. The common people remain intractably 'besotted' (23) by the bells and whistles of their political servitude, leaving la Boétie to his aloof cry 'in honour of freedom', as his posthumous editor and friend, Montaigne, later puts it (2003, 206). Drawing on similar affective premises but to a different political end, Hobbes would argue that government arises as an unfortunate but necessary measure to protect men from their natural warring state, 'a war of all against all' (1998b, I.12-13; cf. 1998a, XIII.8). But whereas Hobbes argues for monarchical political conservatism, Spinoza follows la Boétie's direction in parallel, accounting for the affective power of tyrants and the immanent power of the majority, while emptying out any intrinsic *voluntary capacity* of the populace in their domination. Men fight for their servitude all the while believing it to be their salvation, because that servitude exists at the level of harmful ideas in the affects and imagination.

This point can be explored in greater depth with the aid of an interlocutor, Althusser. Individuals become exploited, coerced and realised through what Althusser will call the ‘*materiality*’ of ideology, through a shared imaginary world of history, traditions, language, rituals, and a bodily ordering or discipline (1997, 9-10; cf. Montag, 1999, 49). Althusser’s comments relate to Spinoza’s description of the Hebrew Republic, and we evaluate them at §3.4, but can be applied most broadly to the men who fight, and who in fighting, embody and realise the conditions of their servitude. The use of his ‘detour’ through Spinoza to reach Marx, Althusser writes, is to understand that ‘the truth of a philosophy lies in its *effects*’ (1997, 4), but that in Spinoza one must be especially sensitive to the subtle reversals in preconceptions of causality. Therefore la Boétie’s voluntarist proposal – ‘you can deliver yourselves ... if you try’ (2012, 8), and what Abensour proclaims as a ‘quest for auto-emancipation’ (2011, 347) – is in Spinoza an impossibility. One cannot deliver oneself ‘free’, for one’s very freedom, by which is meant power, is realised through the society one lives and participates in. One cannot jumpstart will without first having a prior capability to recognise what are harmful ideas that lead to one’s domination by others – and the acquisition of this capability involves a departure from the servitude of harmful ideas.

At the same time, the freedom-loving rebel of la Boétie will be crushed by despotic rule nourished on ignorance and fear unless she/he can meaningfully empower groups of individuals to recognise the common source of their oppression, and its injurious effects on their own abilities. Returning to Althusser, one can recognise that Spinoza places ‘*an apparatus of reversal of causes into ends*’ (1997, 6). It is a feature of one’s very servitude to believe in a capacity of subjective consent or willing to it. There is nothing voluntary however in political domination, and the willing slave is not a tautology but an oxymoron.¹⁹ One

¹⁹ Lordon also remarks similarly (2014, xiii), through the argument that subjects do not actively will their subjugation, but rather have their desires determined by authorities. I evaluate this claim in §1.6.1.

cannot freely submit to slavery, for there is no meaningful agency in submission – an argument Locke would make in his *Second Treatise of Government* two decades later (2003, ch. 4) – hence servitude is better understood as a state of disempowerment that is most often the basis for political rule.

We can therefore debunk claims that Spinoza affirms the possibility of voluntary servitude (contra Abensour, §41). Rather, the problem is used in the TTP as a means by which individuals passively adapt to a belief-system that provides false meanings of their disempowerment, meanings that further perpetuate their weakness. Thus for Deleuze and Guattari, this is ‘the fundamental problem of political philosophy’, and one that ‘Spinoza saw so clearly, and that Wilhelm Reich rediscovered’ (2013a, 42), namely, why subjugated members of a society will not merely assent to but actively will tyrannical rule. But this supposition of an active will is false. The power of ‘pomp and ceremony’ (TTP pref.6), ‘bread and circuses’ (Juvenal, 2010, 80), or the ‘[f]lags, nations, armies, banks [that] get a lot of people aroused’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013a, 334) are not merely contingent problems of voluntary or self-deception, but elemental facts – if secrets – of all human politics. At the same time, they are not features of an agreement in exchange for obedience, but rather systems of belief that provide false but consoling meanings (and opportunities) for the disempowered within the overarching frame of their domination. For as the remainder of the TTP argues, human societies are as susceptible to tyranny by despots and their sad priests as individuals are to harmful ideas themselves. Spinoza’s initial solution, though by no means his only one, is in the tentative arguments for the freedom to philosophise that bookend the TTP, carving out a hopeful and ultimately ineffective space for dissident philosophers. For speech alone is not enough: voices obedient to authorities are always granted free speech and opportunities to communicate, and the given noise of obedient voices can silence the intrinsic reason of critical ones.

We will evaluate these arguments later in §3.4, but can note in passing that the TTP is primarily concerned with dethroning theological authority, in a systematic attack on the effects of revealed religion in perpetuating superstitions and scriptural orthodoxies that prevent people from thinking freely and acting cooperatively and peacefully. Anything that enables a given populace to become more active and empowered, more capable of withstanding the wavering forces of hope and fear, that debunks superstition and weakens the institutions of despotic rule with counter-institutions of democracy and learning, will aid a society's freedom, and thus the inviolability of the state's laws. Yet Spinoza's ambivalence about the capability of the *vulgus* to reasonably associate together and actively seek this common good is instructive in another way as yet unexamined. For while servitude is always harmful, Spinoza will seek to distinguish a concept of obedience that is useful, even necessary for reason, guaranteeing a basic civil harmony by which individuals can escape their natural servitude or vulnerability to each other. I address that later in §1.6.2, as this emerging criterion of *capability* as withstanding harmful ideas leads us onto questions of passivity, activity and power, which another section of the TTP can now help us advance.

§1.3 Natural Right

Our initial definition of servitude (§1.2.1) gave it as a descriptor of disempowerment of an internal kind, of being overwhelmed by affects and beliefs that then determined one to act or think in ways that harmed one's being. Althusser's comment however about a philosophy's truth being in its effects neatly brings us to Spinoza's interest in the politics of servitude, being in the creation or manipulation of shared affects and beliefs that present a meaning to these harmful ideas, a meaning that is used to reinforce the authority of sovereigns, aided by superstition, pomp and ceremony.²⁰ This relation of

²⁰ These systems of shared beliefs and ideas I will hereafter call *collective imaginaries*. My term is influenced by Gatens and Lloyd, 1999, and my divergences from them and interest in unanimity is explained in §3.6.

domination/disempowerment is consequential to the initial condition of servitude: thus, in theory, one could be in servitude to the affects in a free republic, or think freely under tyrannical rule. However, individuals can become subject to another's right (that is to say, power), and transfer their own to another, and in a real way subjects can become slaves where authorities prevent them from thinking freely, and so be unable to overcome harmful ideas. To be clear in our terms, we will call such relations *domination*, so as to distinguish them from the more general condition of *servitude*, with a more elementary criterion of power involved in both. As Spinoza does not give a coherent definition of power in the TTP, unlike *Ethics* (see §2.3.2), we will put aside this problem for now, and instead turn to how relations of domination arise in Spinoza's account, founded in the notion of natural right.

In a gloss of his arguments of Chapter 16, Spinoza presents a concept of natural right (*jure naturali*) in the Preface which, given its location and its conceptual familiarity to readers of Grotius and Hobbes, he does not yet define. Its use does however indicate Spinoza's broader interest in the term, and by proxy its relevance to servitude. Spinoza presents it as belonging to an individual, which 'extends as far as his desire and power extend' (pref.13), it being equivalent but not reducible to them.²¹ The other relevant facet of natural right given is its dynamism: the individual can 'transfer' their right (*or* power) when combining with others to a sovereign authority, one who will in turn take on this right to protect her or him.²² Yet not all right can be transferred: an element always remains with the subject, that of her/his right to think and judge, and can never truly be bequeathed to the sovereign. This

²¹ Tösel (1984, 55) also notes the significance of equivocation in Spinoza, where *sive* is not *est*.

²² Spinoza does not account for how subjects should react if the sovereign authority to which they have transferred their right does not protect them from harm, or even actively harms them. Modern instances of this that come to mind include institutional racism, or repressive police violence. By implication, though Spinoza does not himself assert this, one for whom the transfer is no longer useful (following TTP 16.7) can dissolve their pact, and take up arms to defend themselves. I give an account of Spinozan rebellion in §5.2.

latter phenomenon is relevant to domination, but first, remaining with our simple distinction, let's advance to Chapter 16 to explore what this right *or* power amounts to.

Chapter 16 is the most explicitly political in the TTP, and in twenty-two sections outlines natural right (1-5), the social contract (6-11), civil rights (12-18), and remaining questions of obedience to the sovereign (19-22). Spinoza now offers a definition of natural right, but it is an ineffective one, raising more questions than answers. It is said to be 'the rules determining the nature of each individual thing by which we conceive it is determined naturally to exist and to behave in a certain way' (16.2). Spinoza gives the example of big fish eating smaller fish, and their inhabiting the sea, as indicating a 'sovereign right to do everything it can do'. But this does not actually define what these rules are, why they determine the nature of an individual thing thus, nor, should we wish to pursue him further, what nature is, or existence, and so forth.

We can be charitable: using the preface and the fish analogy, natural right seems to correspond to a thing's *doing* of what preserves its existence. Indeed, what Spinoza offers in this discussion is a precis of his *conatus* doctrine in *Ethics*, Part 3. This is analysed in depth in the following chapter (§2.2), but one can note that Spinoza defines each thing by its *conatus*, from the Latin *conor* (to strive), and meaning its 'striving to persevere in its own being' (E3p6). This *conatus* belongs to all things in nature (cf. 16.2), and in humans, corresponds to appetite, and when appetite is accompanied by consciousness, is desire (3p9s). Spinoza is lastly keen to impress that 'the order of nature ... prohibits nothing but what no-one desires or no-one can do' (16.4; cf. E3p9s). While this doctrine, like much else in Chapter 16, is burdened by the influence of Hobbes, we can agree with Israel (Spinoza, 2007, 197 n2) that Spinoza's attack on Christian natural law like that of Aquinas is much bolder, and most importantly for our purposes, leaves behind an elementary criterion of power. If natural right corresponds to what one can do, and reflects desire *or* power, then the very 'freedom'

Spinoza seeks to define in this chapter (16.1) would seem to correlate to nothing other than the individual's activity or power within a given set of relations, the 'rules determining each individual' defined earlier.

It is still unclear however what this 'freedom' amounts to, and we must be careful to distinguish natural right – belonging to all beings in nature – from freedom, which so far reflects a given ability or liberty. For the title-page writes of the 'freedom to philosophise', the preface of the 'liberty to judge' (pref.8), Chapter 5 of the stateless Hebrews' 'freedom to enact new laws' (5.10), and Chapter 16 of a 'freedom to think and to say what one thinks' (16.1) and, later, in its description of democracy as approaching 'most closely to the freedom nature bestows on every person' (16.11). This use of *libertas* suggests a condition of possibility that reflects a thing's capability to do something. Yet Spinoza adds to his earlier preface definition that natural right is determined 'not by sound reason but by desire and power' (16.3). Its capacity *to do* does not necessarily include a normative predisposition to doing reasonable or morally salubrious things. This definition subverts any belief in a natural or universal human morality (contra Aristotle, Cicero and Christian natural law) while Spinoza's 'eccentric Hobbesian' flourish, to borrow Curley's phrase (1996, 317), is to even subvert Hobbes' objective foundation of a natural law of self-preservation (1998b, 1.8-10): for Spinoza, this natural right only extends so far as what a thing *judges* to be in its own interest,²³ which, lacking 'sound reason', may tend towards its own harm, as his earlier analysis of superstition makes clear. As he argues in the *Ethics*, there is no use in condemning human nature as 'a kingdom within a kingdom' (E3pref), or deriding or bewailing this natural state, since 'nature is not bound by the laws of human reason which aim only at the true interest and conservation of human beings, but rather by numberless other things that

²³ This use of *judge* is a placeholder for an analysis of desire and evaluation in Chapter 2. Note at this stage it refers not to a rational evaluative judgement, but a combination of ideas (affects, beliefs of the first kind of knowledge of E2p40s2, common notions of the second, and so on) which together constitute a decision.

concern the eternal order of the whole nature (of which human beings are but a small part)' (TTP 16.4). It is therefore a feature of the 'order of nature', which 'prohibits nothing but what no one desires or no one can do' (ibid.).

Spinoza makes a similar declaration earlier in Chapter 5, which expands on this problem. 'Now if human beings were so constituted by nature that they desired nothing but what true reason points them to, society would surely need no laws' (5.8). Later in the *Political Treatise* one encounters a similar sentiment. If 'the *plebs* could practise restraint and suspend judgment on matters insufficiently known, or form correct judgment on the basis of scanty information, it would surely be more fit to rule than to be ruled' (TP 7.27). In both cases, Spinoza speculates on the possibility of popular government and a society entirely without the external coercion of the law. Though consistently eschewing any kind of political *telos*, he argues that the reasonable individual will always grasp that it is in their own interest to assist their fellows and maintain the security of their state by obeying its laws. As Spinoza writes in a later annotation, distinguishing his account from Hobbes, 'the more a person is led by reason, i.e. the freer he is, the more resolutely he will uphold the laws of the state and obey the commands of the sovereign authority whose subject he is' (TTP 16, annotation 33).

At the same time, the number of individuals who can acquire sufficient reason (and, by the definition given in annotation 33, can be said to be free, reason and freedom being equivalent) are 'very few', and may only acquire this capacity after a good part of their life has elapsed (8.2; 15.10; 16.3). 'All men do indeed seek their own interest, but it is not from the dictate of sound reason; for the most part they pursue things and judge them to be in their interest merely because they are carried away by lusts [*libidine*] and by their passions (which have no regard for the future and for other things)' (5.8). Spinoza thereby returns back to the problem of servitude, of being overwhelmed by harmful ideas and so subject to

fortune, and to the more imminent political problem of the fear-led *vulgus* whose dependence on superstition may be exploited by monarchical regimes. By this stage, Spinoza has come to the worrying conclusion that natural right is the basis of political power, but such a right has no moral normative content and, being so often passive and in servitude to harmful ideas, often leads to mutual suspicion, conflict and greed. It may even seem that he has done little more than restate Hobbes' own account of natural right, whose implications would carry him towards monarchy.

To steer him from such a result, he must do more than merely reassert the co-extensiveness of right and power (e.g. Ep 50) – he must instead prove that human beings are naturally disposed to allying with each other for a greater good, and that such resulting relations are empowering and liberating from servitude. Such a universal predisposition of human nature would enable his account to explain how individuals become more active and self-determining, capable of conquering their dependence on fortune, superstition or other harmful ideas. This will supply the basis by which he presents an account of democracy as both the most natural political form and more powerful than monarchy. We will now assess his attempt.

§1.4 Laws of Political Reason

'True law is right reason, consonant with nature, spread through all people', writes Cicero in *De re publica* (1999, 71). Though Hobbes and Spinoza were fond of displaying their contempt for 'the Schoolmen' (e.g. 1998a VIII.27, TP 2.15), both borrow heavily from classical sources, and Spinoza particularly reaches a peculiar hybrid of natural law, combining mutual conflict and self-preservation with a classic republican ideal of the pre-eminence and rule of reason, under laws like Cicero's, 'constant and eternal' (ibid.). I will explore these laws across this section, arguing that they present a cogent if underdeveloped theory of empowerment which is given depth in *Ethics*. Its presentation here does however resolve some of the core

ambiguities around freedom as a mere liberty or facility to do something, a concept which, as I argue over this section, is a superficial shell concealing a more robust conception of empowerment.

Following Hobbes' *De Cive*, Spinoza presents a concept of 'divine law' (*lex*), which 'looks only to the supreme good [*summum bonum*]' and is 'the true knowledge and love of God' (TTP 4.3), discerned through natural reason. This is distinguished from 'human law' (*jus*), whose 'only purpose is to protect life and preserve the country', and which culturally varies, resulting in differences around ceremonies, customs, language, historical narrative, and so on.²⁴ In turning to politics in Chapter 16, it is surprising then that *lex* rather than *jus* should appear in a handful of instances.²⁵ It attests to a similar method as that applied to biblical scripture, deploying a critical method to elicit what is reasonable from within the medium, identifying three universal principles in politics.

The first concerns the concept of natural right just discussed, which, in the 'government of nature', is the primary expression of sovereignty: 'it is the supreme law of nature that each thing strives to persevere in its own state so far as it can' (16.2). We will recognise this as the *conatus*. Spinoza adds that this law takes 'no account of another's circumstance but only of its own', by which it is aligned with the thing's own being or interest, but then adds, less convincingly, that 'it follows that each individual thing has a sovereign right to do this'. If we incorporate our discussion of right as *doing* earlier, then this

²⁴ Compare Hobbes, 1998b, II.1-3, III.31-3, and VI.16. Others present *lex* with different findings: Balibar (1997, 192) argues there is an equivalence of *jus/lex* in the chapter, an argument that my reading of the text disagrees with. Rutherford (2010, 144) provides a compelling if convoluted schema that separates descriptive laws (like these) from prescriptive ones (such as civil laws, *jus*). At this stage our focus is on these elementary or 'descriptive' laws – in Chapters 3 and 4 we turn to their political ramifications.

²⁵ Their significance is also obscured by inconsistent translations, which tend to use 'right' or 'decree' (*jus*) and 'law' (*lex*) interchangeably, rendering vague what are in Latin clear laws.

becomes less complicated, and what it leaves us is the conatus as demonstrated from nature, rather than the more complex metaphysics of power in which we find it in E3p6.²⁶

This principle of self-preservation and pursuing what one judges to be a good leads Spinoza to account for the formation of societies which, following Aristotle (1992, 1280b29), Grotius (2005, V.17) and Hobbes (1998b, I.2), emerge out of a group of individuals in nature recognising the benefits of ‘mutual aid’ and ‘the cultivation of reason’ (16.5), as well as the common protection of property, through which they form a basic political agreement that inaugurates the state. It is significant that this happens so quickly: Spinoza uses the law of natural right to explain why individuals, necessarily weak, vulnerable and in servitude to harmful affects in the state of nature, are predisposed to allying together. While this is then used as the basis for Spinoza’s account of the social contract (6-8), it first appears as a combination of multiple individuals who together cohere into a unity – or what I will hereafter call a *collective* – whose right is far greater than any individual's alone.²⁷ Thus Spinoza writes that ‘without mutual help and the cultivation of reason’, human beings necessarily live in great misery, and thus ‘for security, it was best to live as one’ (16.5).²⁸ This minimal social association, founded on security amid hostility and unreason, then becomes the foundation for their empowerment, and Spinoza maps out this process from the initial social agreement. This would allow that they ‘collectively [*collective*] have the right to all things that each individual had from nature’, thus ensuring the agreement was useful to

²⁶ Bove (2002, 108-9) reaches a similar observation in arguing for the primacy of conatus in the ‘collective individual’ of the Hebrew Republic – collective individuation is evaluated later in §3.2.2.

²⁷ I give a more thorough account of the social contract in §3.4 and §4.4.

²⁸ I have departed from the Israel and Silverthorne translation here in order to capture the importance of this *oneness*, which will be profoundly important throughout the work. Their version has the same passage as: ‘it was necessary for people to combine together in order to live in security and prosperity’ (2007, 197), but there is no mention of ‘people’ or ‘prosperity’ in the original Latin, and *in unum conspirare* is more forceful than combine. I mention this in passing to indicate some of the interpretive risks with relying on translations that, for good reasons and to the advantage of most readers, elect legibility at times over literal meaning.

each, and that their collective right 'would no longer be determined by the force and appetite of each individual but by the power and will of all of them together' (ibid.).

This results in the 'agreement' (*pactum*) to transfer their individual rights into the collective of 'all of them together', rather than merely vertically up to the sovereign monarch, as Hobbes has it. This aspect of combination and unity remains underdeveloped in the text, but it is worth recognising here a seed in germination, indicating a development in political thought beyond Hobbes. Societies are instead established according to this 'sole dictate of reason', the mutual empowerment and collective right of all, which, in order to remain secure, requires an obedience to this agreement. This obedience bears a number of similarities to the prescriptions of E5p10s (cf. §2.3), including restraining one's appetites, moderating one's conduct to treat others as one would wish to be treated, and protecting the rights of one's fellow subjects – all conduct which, by easy extrapolation, empowers oneself and others, and lessens the servitude of harmful ideas.

This becomes the basis of asserting a second 'universal law of human nature', that 'no one neglects anything that they deem good unless they hope for a greater good or fear a greater loss' (16.6). This appears in the context of the social contract, but contra Aristotle or Grotius, initially empties it out of any teleological associations around virtue, *koinonia* or sociality.²⁹ Instead, of 'two good things every single person will choose the one which he himself judges to be the greater good, and of two bad things he will choose that which he deems to be less bad' (ibid.). So long as *we judge* our place in a community to be more beneficial or useful than being outside it, we will remain within it. This second law also destabilises Hobbes' reliance on the social contract as a single and intractable moment for politics, placing priority not with the sanctity of the oath itself, but the utility in obeying it. If our social bonds are based on the choice of the greater of two goods – which, in another

²⁹ These are evaluated in depth later in §4.2.2.

way, is a more elementary statement of self-interest, a doctrine propagated particularly by the De la Courts (1702; cf. Weststeijn, 2012, 173-6) – then the reasonable, secure state must continually realise the common *interest* of its people.

Thus we remain in society where it is ‘in our interest’, otherwise the utility of remaining in such an agreement is lost and the contract ‘fails and remains void’ (TTP 16.7). This itself reflects a form of desire as a social judgement, and also indicates the fundamental good of civic participation which Spinoza refines and focuses on later in his politics.³⁰ In effect, it enshrines the investment of desire, the seeking of a greater good or avoidance of greater evil, as a basic principle for political stability. It also offers a means of understanding the emergence of rebellion when an agreement no longer serves a use, and becomes void to the subject. This principle should play ‘the most important role in the formation of a state’, in that there must always remain a motive for not violating the agreement, in that it would ‘result in greater loss than gain for the violator’ (ibid.).³¹ If a society cannot offer a sufficient good to motivate the loyalty of the individual, then it must rely on sufficient fear to prevent them seeking to disobey its decrees. From the political exploitation of fear and our natural predisposition to superstition by which we are led to unreasonable, harmful ideas, we can determine that natural right and the greater good coincide in identifying the root causes of disempowerment.

Spinoza’s third law illuminates this claim, and appears in his argument for democracy, the model most naturally expressive of collective right and participation in a state, ensuring its security and continued peace. In a definition that is much more expansive than his later account in the TP (cf. §4.5.2), he describes democracy as ‘an assembly of all men which collegially [*collegialiter*] has the greatest right to all that is in its power [*potest*]' (16.8; see

³⁰ §2.4 unpacks desire’s nature, including being that of a judgement. Spinoza uses Hobbes’ example of lying to a highway robber to substantiate this claim. See Garrett, 2010 for an incisive comparison.

³¹ For Hobbes’ original example, see 1998b, II.16.

also 16.11; 20.14).³² *Collegialiter* also appears twice in Chapter 5, describing what is paraphrased as democracy ('the whole of society, if it is able [*potest*], should hold command [*imperium*] collegially': 5.9; cf. 5.10), founded in collective right and capability.³³ This distinction in terms is significant, mapping out the agency of subjects within the agreement. *Collegialiter* reflects a capability for deliberation, as distinguished from the bulk collective right invested (though rarely active) in the state. This distinction is important, and underlies democracy's pre-eminence as a political form in the TTP. Mimicking Hobbes in *De Cive*, though for very different ends, it is also the most 'natural' form of government (Hobbes, 1998b, VII.5). For societies *can* be formed 'without any alienation of natural right, and the contract can be preserved in its entirety with complete fidelity, only if every person transfers all the power they possess to society' (16.8). Such a 'supreme natural right over all things' like that possessed by this society, which can count on the obedience of all its subjects, is not a coercive monarchy like that of the Ottoman Empire (pref.6), but a 'democracy', for only here can all subjects participate in civil life.

In turn, each of its citizens must obey the directives of the sovereign power, however absurd – again, a Hobbesian argument – though with another transformation: these decisions express the collective desire of the people, the fundamental power of a political state. Thus Spinoza imagines that this obedience will not involve coercion, but consent and free participation (a distinction addressed in §1.6.2), and that such a collective right, collegially expressed in large deliberative assemblies, will result in the natural triumph of reason over unreason, so Spinoza hopes (TTP 16.9).³⁴ This obedience is premised on the third conception of *lex* in this chapter: 'in a state and government where the welfare of the people

³² Another divergence from Israel and Silverthorne (2007, 200): Spinoza uses *collegialiter* here and 20.2 to describe democracy, rather than *collective* as used earlier in 16.5, used just once in the text.

³³ The root word later makes it into TP 8.5, where Spinoza gives a veiled endorsement of the democratic power of guilds (or corporations, *collegia*).

³⁴ See §3.6 for a critical account of this argument.

[*salus populi*], not that of the ruler, is the supreme law, he who obeys the sovereign in all things should not be called a slave useless to himself but rather a subject' (16.10). The *salus populi* is a common trope of Roman republicanism, popularised chiefly in this era via Cicero, and even Hobbes (1998a, XXX.1) presents it as foundational in his monarchical politics of natural conflict and self-interest.³⁵ Spinoza's deployment of the classic motif appears however in an account of sovereign power rooted in democracy. Thus the most orderly state is the one that most greatly expresses the common interests and desires of all its constituent parts, 'all of them together', a unity greater than the sum of its parts, whose rights have been freely transferred into the collective. Their collective right, or desire, is the basis of the reasonable and free political state.

He remarks on this again in Chapter 19 even more forthrightly, re-asserting this political law (*lex*) as prior to all others: 'the people's welfare is the supreme law to which all other laws both human and divine must be accommodated' (19.10). But in turn, only effective institutions and laws, like those which best represent common desire, justice and piety, will ensure that the greater of two goods is desired and the state remains in existence. In this way Spinoza argues that the free state is the most reasonable one (16 annotation 33; cf. 20.6). Human freedom is only possible in a stable state, and the goal of the state is, in the final case, 'to free everyone from fear so that they may live in security', enabling them to develop their abilities and live well in peace. To this extent, 'the true purpose of the state is in fact freedom' (TTP 19.10).³⁶

From our initial account of servitude, we have now determined that it describes an individual's internal state in being dominated by ideas that dispose it to think or act in ways harmful to itself (§1.2.1-2). This internal state involves a set of ideas about her/his

³⁵ Spinoza is not the first to link this to democracy: the De la Courts argue similarly in *Politike Weeg-schaal* (1662), a popular Dutch republican work which he had most likely read by this point (see Weststeijn, 2012, 270). On the influence of *salus populi* at the time, see James, 2012, 237.

³⁶ This striking passage is analysed later in §4.2.3.

disempowerment which render it meaningful if not acceptable, rather than intolerable – thus the various definitions (s_x) accounted for inadequate ideas that explain and reinforce that individual's passivity and inability to restrain the power of these harmful ideas. The individual is passive in this process and cannot will what they are inactive in – thus, voluntary servitude is fallacious (§1.2.3). Note that we have yet to account for why individuals are so effectively dominated that they experience another's right and desire as their own. Indeed, the account of natural right (§1.3) found it co-extensive with desire and power, the latter understood merely as the ability to do something. It comes with no moral or reasonable inclinations, and Spinoza goes further than Hobbes in attributing the instrumental role of judgement in determining what one does or desires as part of striving to persevere in one's being. One's self-caused desire, that from which the dominated are seemingly alienated, therefore has some instrumental role in freedom.

By §1.4 I began to determine three elementary laws of human nature as they apply to politics, explaining why natural right is the basis and stability of the state, and why desire, in seeking the greater of two goods, is instrumental in maintaining societal obedience to the utility of the common good. As with natural right however, the argument finds itself colliding with the influence of harmful ideas. If desire is a means by which individuals can come to seek ends that realise the good of all collegially, how then are harmful desires replaced by beneficent ones? To put the problem more concisely: how does one go from having a mind owned to a mind of one's own? The case of the three laws has established, for this chapter's purposes, the intrinsic conditions of a political *reason* inherent to the TTP, a reason that correlates to the empowerment and freedom of *one and all*. I will now return to Spinoza's earlier dismissal of the *vulgus*, developing this emerging criterion of power and its relation to reason and freedom.

§1.5 From *Vulgus* to *Populus*

Term	English	Latin (nominative), singular/plural where applicable	<i>Ethics</i>	<i>TTP</i>	<i>TP</i>
pleb-	plebs	plebs/plebes	0	23	25
vulg-	rabble	vulgus	17	74	3
popul-	people	populus/populi	0	147	4
multitud-	mass	multitudo/ multitudines	1	6	69
civ-	citizen	civis/cives	6	37	85

In this section I present data that has a bearing on arguments across the thesis (particularly §3.6, §4.3, and §5.3), and which serves to clarify servitude's status as one of disempowerment, and the kinds of political means Spinoza envisions as empowering individuals collectively. The data here, carried out using a keyword search of Spinoza's *Opera* (1925/2009),³⁷ is partly intended as an illustrative rebuttal against claims made particularly by Negri (2003) and many others subsequently regarding the pre-eminence of the *multitudo* across Spinoza's politics, a claim that is textually unwarranted. Montag (2005, 671 n2) concedes the interpretative problems of placing *multitudo* at the heart of Spinoza's politics, yet, with Matheron (1988, 378), argues that the conditions for their possibility are established in the third and fourth parts of *Ethics*. Along these lines, one could say they are an 'immanent cause' of politics, as Matheron writes elsewhere of democracy in *TP* (1997, 217). My interest in collectives and collective desire rather than multitudes and the multitude's desire can be affirmed negatively and positively against these readings: negatively, I disagree with Montag that the multitude is necessary to understanding Spinoza's co-extension of natural right and power, and struggle to recognise the benefit of

³⁷ Anonymous Spinoza scholars have produced a digitised edition of Gebhardt's *Opera* (Spinoza, 2009, <http://spinoza.tk> [URL accessed 07.12.16]), with searchable text. This has been an invaluable resource for this kind of meticulous philological work, and I have cross-referenced findings with the printed edition, which has proven its accuracy. How old the digital edition is, or who produced it, I cannot determine, though links circulate online from 2009, hence its dating.

esoteric readings of Spinoza's politics which read his own stated views as contrary to what he actually thinks (or these readers do). Spinoza's contempt for disempowered groups like *vulgus* and *multitudo* reflects a political interest in empowerment – becoming a *populus*, or *cives* – thus I agree with Balibar when he observes 'degrees of union' (2005, 90) in Spinoza's account of group subjects, even if I differ in not emphasising *multitudo*. Positively, in this chapter and the next I produce an alternative account of power through association (§1.4), obedience to reason (§1.6.2) and desire (§2.4). I will argue that collectivity is a concept with greater explanatory power, textual merit and subsequent political relevance than multitude. It is also immediately apparent that there is a systematic shift in terminology between the TTP and the TP (§4.3 accounts for this), and that the most common terms for group subjects in the TTP are *vulgus*, *populus* and *plebs*. Putting other interpretive matters aside for the moment, I will now account for the differences in these terms, drawing occasionally on Balibar, who has also taken a systematic and rigorous interest in Spinoza's precise terminology.

Though Spinoza never presents an explicit schema for his terms, unlike Hobbes, there are particular instances where terms vary in the same sentence while referring to the same grouping, variations that indicate what these terms amount to. Take for instance Chapter 8 of the TTP, where the Hebrew people form a covenant with God via Moses's Ten Commandments: 'When he had finished reading these and the plebs [*plebe*] had understood them, the people [*populus*] bound themselves to them with full consent' (8.5). When speaking of a politically-organised collective group that possesses sovereignty (as the Hebrews are said to, with their theocracy under God), then they are a *populus* (following Hobbes in *De Cive*, 1998b, XII.8). There is no *populus* without the agreement (*pactum*) that brings the state into existence, and which maintains it, but not all subjects of any given state are of the *populus*.

The passive *plebs* can become a sovereign and active *populus*, but this requires a degree of capability, and Spinoza is ambivalent about the extent to which all subjects can become *populi* (cf. §3.6). When this grouping is internally disorganised and passive to outside forces – either through exclusion from decision-making, or not possessing sufficient capability or collective unity – they are referred to as *plebs*. For Balibar, *plebs* is a ‘sociopolitical’ category, defining the mass of people opposed to those who govern, the “‘inferiors’” (Balibar, 1994, 11), and combined with our early criterion of power as expressed through a spectrum of passivity-activity, this socio-political reading is useful.

The most typical term for the common people is *vulgus*, and is used pejoratively to describe instances where they are determined by a sad affect or superstitious belief to act in ways that destabilise the state, most often through fear. It can be said that the *vulgus* is always in servitude, in that it is always being determined to act or think by the influence of harmful ideas. Thus Balibar is right to term *vulgus* an ‘epistemological’ category, though not one enthralled strictly by ‘prejudices’ (1994, 11), but rather a broader set of ideas that it is not the cause of but which it is animated by, despite such ideas harming its common good, and perpetuating its misery. *Vulgus* most concisely correlates to the under-educated common people as manipulated and excited by religious demagogues to harm others, particularly those freedom-loving philosophers like Spinoza and his late friend Koerbagh. The term *multitudo*, central to Negri’s analysis, only appears six times in the TTP, either as a direct quotation from another author or, in two instances, to pejoratively describe a violent historical event inflicted by the masses. To attempt to present a concept of *multitudo* as systematic across Spinoza’s works is untenable given its minimal usage in the TTP and *Ethics*, and so to claim it as ‘the unity of two aspects’, socio-political and epistemological, as Balibar does (1994, 11), is unwarranted.

It is remarkable on first inspection that Spinoza seems to have no interest in empowering the *vulgus*. He frequently admonishes their ‘fickle’, ‘inconstant’ nature and warns them not to read his work, and Balibar has rightly described a double-edged ‘fear of the masses’ (1994, 5) in the TTP, a claim evaluated later at §3.6. Curley (in Spinoza, 2016, 500, 620), LeBuffe (2015, 331) and Frankel (2011, 62) also observe a pungent dislike of the *vulgus* in Spinoza, and this presents an apparent contradiction with his esteem elsewhere for democratic assemblies and the inevitability of reason triumphing in group deliberation (TTP 20.14). Some of this interpretive difficulty can be solved by recognising that the terms demarcate two different states of empowerment: those who collectively transfer what they can of their right freely, into an agreement in which all are capable of becoming sovereign, and actively participate in the state, are the *populus*. Those who are subjects in the state but, for various reasons, are passive members within it and do not participate in its affairs, are the *plebs*.³⁸ The subjects who become *possessed* by harmful ideas, to the detriment of the common good which holds the state together, are the *vulgus* (it is not clear if they are also *plebs* or *populus*, suggesting flexibility). Spinoza does not appeal to the *vulgus*, because he does not want it to exist. Instead, the ideal of popular collective sovereignty that he terms ‘democracy’ in Chapter 16 is one in which the *plebs* are all politically enfranchised, and being sovereign and able to participate, become a *populus*.

Thus the path to collective freedom travels from *vulgus* to *populus*. In his use of terms, Spinoza tangentially indicates a route towards popular freedom, in overcoming the servitude of the passive *vulgus* to socially harmful ideas, by developing more cooperative relations, more peaceful societies, and more representative social institutions. This argument is more theoretically advanced and original than the TTP’s ostensible claims for freedom of speech. Beneath it is a sophisticated argument for democracy as collegial power, collectively desired,

³⁸ This category is largely replaced by *multitudo* in the TP, with *plebs* being used to describe the historical lower classes of a given society.

that is, a desire experienced by a like-minded grouping for its shared, common good. We will determine the features of that desire and unanimity in the next two chapters, as there remains an unaddressed feature of our problem: how the *vulgus* become possessed by destructive passions.

§1.6 Powers of Reason

In this penultimate section of Chapter 1, I wish to raise and explore two features of servitude: the first will bear on the earlier question of voluntary servitude, and concerns the experience of ‘enlistment’ and the illusion of consent (§1.6.1). This then allows me to consider obedience, a feature that might seem to pertain to servitude but which, in Spinoza’s analysis, can be an obedience to reason, in which a *populus* is empowered by its common consent to what are defined as reasonable laws (§1.6.2). The conclusion then raises a final feature of servitude, the illusion of free will or voluntarism (§1.7), which leads to a number of difficulties concerning desire and power analysed in the next chapter.

§1.6.1 Enlistment

So why do some fight for their servitude as if it were their salvation? The foregoing discussion indicates that they act out of an internal weakness caused by being overpowered or possessed by ideas harmful to oneself and others. They are passive then in their fighting, but we still need to determine how something seemingly internal and traditionally autonomous, the human mind, can be broken down, broken into, and re-programmed to act in such a catastrophic manner. To grasp this, I return to the voluntary servitude debate.

Lordon uses a concept of ‘enlisting’ to describe how fearful individuals not merely acquiesce in the ‘master-desire’ externally imposed on them, but come to recognise and pursue it *as* their own (2014, 3-4). He observes a process of ‘capture’, wherein authorities enlist their subordinates to not merely assent to being dominated but actually experience a

sense of freedom, activity, even joy in their subjugation. The effect is a complete capture of the individual's 'interiority', a process of 'co-linearisation', in which the desire of the subject comes to totally coincide with that of the authority (2014, 79-80).³⁹ In this way, what are experienced as 'consent' and 'freedom' are instead dangerous prejudices and instances of what we define as servitude. 'To produce consent is to produce in individuals a love for the situation in which they have been put', he writes (98).

This is not an altogether fair assessment when applied to Spinoza – in the next subsection I will evaluate Spinoza's arguments for obedience to reason and common consent as political goods – but Lordon's turn to this 'capture' of consent illuminates some of the internal features of domination in ways that Spinoza leaves implicit. As Sévérac (2005, 23) and more recently Read (2016, 260) observe, even the subject's passive joys are not themselves empowering, because they are not a cause of them. Applying a finding about harmful ideas from §1.2.1, a state of servitude is reinforced by believing one's consent, joys or free will is one's own. There is nothing normatively liberating about a given desire (a claim I develop later in §.2.4). In Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* we also find a similarly forthright account of the social investment of desire, explaining the individual's desire *for* and attachment *to* coercive forms, and their passive affective experiences of hope and joy within them. Desire precedes everything – '*There is only desire and the social, and nothing else*' (2013a, 42) – and so desire must be accounted for within every power formation, including in its very own self-repression.

Whereas Lordon's account extends only so far as 'happy subjection', Deleuze and Guattari offer a more sophisticated model of desires, in which some are liberatory or

³⁹ Lordon focuses on joyous affects, i.e. how the worker's desire is co-linearised to positively desire a master-desire. Fleming (2015, 83-6) rejects this, arguing that neoliberal capitalism coerces workers through sad affects like fear and abandonment, thus management mantras of joy or love are irrelevant to most workers' lives ('a rich man's version of Marx': 46). While I agree with Fleming's critique, Lordon's analysis of the role of desires and affects in political servitude remains robust enough to help outline the thesis' core problem.

‘molecular’, and others contain an implicit desire for authoritarianism and are ‘molar’ (2013a, 334). They are particularly interested in the latter, often at the expense of the former’s clarity. ‘Repressing desire, not only for others but in oneself, being the cop for others and for oneself – that is what arouses’ (2013a, 394), they argue, accounting for a libidinal economy of fascism that experiences pleasure in its overpowering of others. In attempting to explain Reich’s sexual-political question “why did the masses desire fascism?” in 1930s Germany (1972, 216-20; cf. §5.5.3), Deleuze and Guattari – and following their trajectory, Theweleit (2003, 211-26) – indicate the nature of libidinal investment in forms of authority within which one enlists one’s desire and imagines participating within, if not *as*, an indispensable part of that authority. Hence the power of nationalism, or any molar aggregate of power. Those who fight for their servitude under the monarch *do* actually desire such subjugation, according to this analysis. In their schema this reflects their desire, which has been ‘reterritorialized’ or incorporated into supporting and identifying with the state’s desire, making them a ‘*subjugated group*’ (2013a, 394).

One need not agree with the sub-idealist, transcendental model of desire of Deleuze and Guattari in order to grasp the significance of this.⁴⁰ By their schema, there is something within the invested desire that perpetuates subjugation, whereas by contrast in the ‘*subject-group*’ (ibid.), their desire has reached a state of multiplicity, unfettered by repressive social investments. Drawing on Spinoza’s three political laws, we could describe this difference in desire as a problem of consciousness: no-one will submit their right in order to live in society unless there is some perceived greater good on their part.

The problem is the perception then of this good: ‘voluntary’ servitude raises difficult situations of when many might prefer not to, to echo Bartleby’s phrase, but continue to

⁴⁰ Peden (2014, 196-8) similarly observes a Heideggerian aspect to Deleuze’s notion of desire, at odds with Spinoza’s own immanent, dynamic model of power.

acquiesce, believing it to be in their greater interest or for the common good to fight for the tyrant. We can agree with Abensour (2015, §17) that there is no ‘collective political suicide’ in such obedience, but even expedient, useful grounds for it, like the survival of oneself or one’s family. This problem of consciousness raises more issues than can yet be resolved, but we can round up by noting the weakness of merely affirming desire itself, or social withdrawal, or ‘the inverse subordination and the overthrow of power’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013a, 416). One cannot overthrow power except through a power of one’s own, and attempting ‘escape’ (e.g. 2013a, 317) may render one even more vulnerable to tyrants and malicious priests. Instead, drawing on the third law, freedom from servitude is only possible through reassembling a reasonable collective power.

§1.6.2 Free Obedience

An unexamined premise of these critics of voluntary servitude is the intrinsic evil of obedience. There is no accounting in Deleuze and Guattari, Lordon or Abensour of Spinoza’s own arguments for the necessity of obeying the social contract, nor of his warnings against rebellion (cf. §5.2.1). This is understandable, given that any poorly-assembled argument for obedience can easily be read as a defence of tyranny in all forms, but this is not what Spinoza sought to argue for. I wish to briefly identify the necessity and good of a certain kind of obedience in this part, one that Spinoza considers indispensable to the freedom of the *populus*.

‘The freest state’, writes Spinoza, ‘is that whose laws are founded on sound reason; for there each man can be free whenever he wishes, that is, he can live under the guidance of reason with his whole mind’ (TTP 16.10). Freedom corresponds to reason: thus the state is freest when the laws which determine its actions are reasonable, and the individual within it is free to the extent that she/he can live reasonably, without fear of repression or interference. These reasonable laws (*jus*) are those that recognise the prior laws (*lex*) of

human nature (§1.4), and thus the inalienability of an individual's right to think, as well as their natural susceptibility to the servitude of harmful ideas, from which the state will try to protect the subject for their own interest, as a parent does for their child (TTP 16.10). One is under no moral or natural compulsion to pursue reason; rather, each pursues the object of their appetites. To live by imagination and custom alone is to be subject to fortune, the uncertain affects of hope and fear, which makes us vulnerable to servitude and domination. Our freedom, or power of activity, is therefore assisted and actualised through laws that determine us to live reasonably, empowering ourselves and others as a community of cooperative, mutually assisting individuals.

Spinoza's support for these laws follows Hobbes' argument that the social contract is the investment of a collective's right (16.8; cf. Hobbes, 1998b, II.5) – thus, if I break the laws, I forfeit the rights of everyone else invested into a society, and thus, by this argument, do great harm to the common good. In this way the religion of the Hebrew Republic is at times described as little more than a rulebook for civil harmony: 'nothing else is promised in the Bible in return for their obedience but the continued prosperity of their state and other good things in life' (TTP 3.6). Spinoza intimates in his rationalist analysis of religion, perhaps even reason itself demands a kind of obedience (as Kant would later put, '*Argue as much as you like and about whatever you like, but obey!*': 1991, 59). At its root is an emerging, ontologically-derived argument for collective empowerment that begins in the domain of servitude, among the influence of harmful affects, beliefs and desires, and re-programmes them into dispositions for thoughts and activities that enable one and all to live reasonably together, that is, in a mutually-empowering way.⁴¹ Such 'obedience' does not refer then to

⁴¹ To *behave and think reasonably* – I have in mind Steinberg's concept of a state's subjects thinking 'as-if' reasonably, acting 'in accordance' with reason rather than 'from' it (2009, 46) – evaluated later in §4.2.3.

absolute submission to tyranny, but an obedience to reason, being an obedience to the common good, the third law of human nature.⁴²

To make this distinction easier to grasp, we can turn to Chapter 5 where Spinoza offers another foundation for political states, in his separation of ‘obedience’ and ‘common consent’. In the former, the *vulgus* simply obeys commands of a ruler, often through fear, so as simply to survive; in the latter, the *populus* organises together to protect each other’s natural right, thus strengthening its own right collectively, under a democratic government wherein power is evenly, collegially distributed. For ‘since obedience consists in carrying out commands on the sole authority of a ruler, it follows that [such subordination] has no place in a society whose government is in the hands of all and where laws are made by common consent’ (TTP 5.9). In acting ‘by their own proper consent’, they remain ‘free’, not in the sense either of ‘a natural liberty’ that la Boétie would recognise, or the false faculty of ‘free will’, but a freedom that correlates precisely to its power.

In these cases, the *populus* by common consent agrees to obey laws that guarantee the freedom of one and all, rules which take into account the laws of human nature. In obeying such rules unanimously, the *populus* obeys the common good of its collective power. Though my outline of this argument is somewhat condensed and restrictive, we will return to this important argument for obedience to reason in §§3.4-6, §4.4 and §5.2.

§1.7 Conclusion

In acting and working together peacefully in an organised and secure political form, a disorganised, fickle and inconstant *vulgus* becomes a free *populus*, living in accordance with reason. Its obedience is not to a tyrannical monarch, or the asylum of ignorance which superstition provides, but an obedience to reason, through acts and thoughts that facilitate

⁴² On unanimity and obedience to the common good, §3.2.2 and §4.3 are pertinent to the argument.

friendship, cooperation and mutual empowerment, facilitated by the reasonable laws and institutions of its state. Towards a not dissimilar end, Arendt's arguments for popular consent three centuries later illustrate the point, that all political institutions are 'manifestations and materializations of power; they petrify and decay as soon as the living power of the people ceases to uphold them' (1970, 41), the very same analogy of organic life/popular power used by la Boétie. In all cases, as Spinoza's primary *pactum* makes clear, the power of the state is immanently realised in the freedom of its people. Where such subjects are no more than 'slaves' (17.6) or 'beasts and automata' (20.6), there one finds the weakest of states, and one where the possibility of achieving the mind's freedom through the adequate contemplation of truths is slim to nil.

If natural right and desire present both laws and means of stabilising a reasonable state (§§1.3-4), across this chapter we encountered the difficult matter of what constitutes these rights and desires. For servitude is not merely in being under another's right, but describes how a passive, subjugated individual is possessed by harmful ideas that often obscure the actual cause of their disempowerment, be it fortune, superstition, or the glories of the king. Over the chapter we attempted to raise instances where individuals might become more active or reasonable (particularly §1.6.2), but unless we can account for the liberatory nature of desire and freedom in some depth, then at best our model of freedom may just be another competing illusion for the attentions of the *vulgus*. For voluntary servitude also raises the problem of voluntarism, free will, and where a *vulgus* might experience an affect or desire as their own, or feel free in committing an action harmful to themselves or others to which an authority has determined them. I wish to bring the chapter to a close with a final remark on this.

In Ep 58, Spinoza uses the example of a stone thrown through the air to distinguish his concept of freedom from Cartesian free will. He begins by restating his definition of

freedom as acting without constraint – ‘I say that a thing is free which exists and acts solely from the necessity of its own nature’ (Ep 58) – a state that can only belong to God as ‘*natura naturans*’ (cf. E1df7, 1p17, 1p29; DPP 2.8). By contrast, finite modes of nature are ‘*natura naturata*’, necessarily determined by an external causal chain ‘to exist and to act in a fixed and determinate way’ (Ep 58). The stone thrown into the air has been determined so by a series of causes it could not possibly understand, even were it to suddenly develop consciousness, as Spinoza suggests. ‘Now this stone, since it is conscious only of its striving [*conatus*] and is not at all indifferent, will surely think that it is completely free, and that it continues in motion for no other reason than that it so wishes’. Experiencing only the motion of the given state it is in, and unaware of the external causes that have determined that in a fixed way, the stone would necessarily believe itself to be its free cause and agent. Likewise, those who fight for their domination by a tyrant do not (or perhaps will not) recognise the causes that have driven them, and perhaps their parents or grandparents, into conditions of such weakness and social division that a tyrant’s protection from fear is better than the democratic rule of all.

Spinoza invites his friend Schuller to compare this amusing thought experiment with the ‘human freedom which all men boast of possessing’, which ultimately amounts to no more than that ‘men are conscious of their appetites’, which, Spinoza defines elsewhere as ‘desire’ (E3p9s), being ‘unaware of the causes by which they are determined’. Spinoza gives further examples in the letter that are repeated verbatim at E3p2s, of the infant that might freely suppose it desires milk, the angry child, revenge, and the coward, flight. The drunkard may adhere to the dictum “in vino veritas”, that ‘it is from his free decision that he says what he later, when sober, would wish to be left unsaid’ (ibid.), failing to recognise the causation of affects, appetites and the disinhibiting effect of his drink. In these examples, Spinoza is arguing that our belief in our free will is precisely that, a belief, one ‘innate’ to our natural condition, whose delusory feature of ‘choice’ reflects only the conflict of appetite against

custom or moral instruction weakly understood (hence ‘I see the better, yet I do the worse’, as Spinoza quotes Ovid).⁴³ Thus, in a profound way, the servitude that men fight for is the perpetuation of the servitude inside their own minds, being the overwhelming power of harmful ideas that offer stupefying consolations for their weakened state, the bread and circuses or jingoist narratives which reward, rather than secure, passive defeat and obedience.

Returning to the TTP, Spinoza notes that in nature, the wise man has as much ‘sovereign right to do all things that reason dictates’ as the ‘ignorant or intemperate person to do ‘everything that desire suggests’ (16.2). This is not to pessimistically relegate the good life of reason, but to compare two different experiences of desire, one committed to the rational actualisation of its powers wherein freedom lies, the other bound by appetite and fortune and condemned to servitude. Like the stone, both authentically experience their activity as *theirs*, and each will pursue their natural right with vigour, though the intemperate person will not recognise the causes of their desires, or will feel akratically unable to do anything about them, and their harmful ideas will weaken their power of acting and those around them. Spinoza draws the comparison again in *Ethics*, where he notes that ‘there is also no small difference between the joy which guides the drunkard and the joy possessed by the philosopher’ (E3p57s). The joy of the former is necessarily short-lived, accompanied later by sad affects that correlate to a diminishment of power; the latter by the joyful passive affects of love, and active affects of fortitude, generosity and courage, which by nature are more intensive and enduring (3p59s).⁴⁴

Though the reasonable person pursues the same conative drive as the fearful ignorant person, the former will experience greater joy as their activities widen and power increases.

⁴³ This is to touch briefly on the problem of akrasia – a difficulty for political desire, as Stolze (2014, 572) also notes, and one analysed in §2.4.2.

⁴⁴ My translations for the active affects of *fortitudo*, *generositas* and *animositas* (3p59s).

In this way, we can sketch out an elementary criterion of power-freedom, the two being equivalent without also being reducible to one another, whose realisation correlates to reason. This chapter demonstrated that servitude is a weakness of an individual or group wherein they are possessed by the desires or interests of another. It observed six instances of servitude within Spinoza, and presented an epistemological-political account of collective servitude as possession by harmful ideas, taking place on affective, imaginative and conative registers. The task ahead is to account for freedom, power and desire, and ascertain how individuals become less powerful or more, and the roles of desires and ideas in this process.

Chapter 2. Powers of Desire

§2.1 Introduction

Much of human life is spent clouded by the imagination and sad passive affects, rendering us vulnerable to fears, fortune and superstitions that lead to our servitude and domination, as explored in the last chapter. As Heidi Ravven notes, no-one is a ‘tabula rasa’ (2002, 197), free to choose as they wish, but we instead come pre-programmed by a vast number of imaginative, linguistic, local and affective determinants, socially predisposing us to act and react within a limited number of ways. Yet Spinoza makes some of the most strident claims for the possibility of human liberation and freedom in the history of philosophy. While what we judge to be our own ‘will’ and ‘desire’ is often illusory and premised on an ignorance of their causes (§1.7), Spinoza insists that natural right *or* desire are the primary ethical means available for becoming free. This applies to individuals and collectives, because Spinoza’s ontological criterion of power has both an ethical and political character. Yet paradoxically for Spinoza, much of our freedom consists in recognising what is beyond our control. How then can the source of our servitude become a means for liberation?

In this chapter I argue that Spinoza’s foundation for individual empowerment through desire clarifies the problems of servitude discussed in the last chapter. The analysis proceeds thus: I first assess Spinoza’s conatus doctrine and its interpretation to extract an applicable definition of conatus (§2.2). Freedom and power are then defined and distinguished in §2.3, preparing the groundwork for an ontology of power and an ethics of capability concerned with making all human beings as free as possible, or as I term it, *becoming freer*. From there, §2.4 moves to desire, reconstructing a common doctrine out of four definitions which is distinguished from conatus, will and appetite. With this theory in hand, I subject it to three

critical tests, forming the longest section of the chapter (§2.5): the difficulties of teleology, akrasia, and its relation to other passive affects. Altered but still intact, this original concept of desire as a form of affective-cognitive consciousness is restated in §2.6, providing the thesis with a testable definition of desire for subsequent chapters. Five additional claims about human freedom are derived from this definition, to which these chapters will return. The conclusion uses the chapter's findings to challenge a prevailing reading of Spinoza as an 'egoist', and introduces the priority of society and common power (hinted in §1.4), and unpacked in the next chapter.

While I will rely chiefly on the *Ethics* in this chapter to explain the philosophical foundation for empowerment, it should not be assumed that political freedom is somehow epiphenomenal or a separate domain to the ethical freedom of the individual (contra Prokhovnik, 2004, 203-8; Strauss, 1988, ch. 5; Yovel, 1992, 108; and a lesser extent Kisner, 2009, 9). On the contrary, I will argue that freedom is only achievable for the individual through her/his relations with others, and in this sense is collective. This is one of the key claims of the thesis, and while much of this chapter is concerned with constructing an ontology of power that accounts for individual freedom, there will be a running observation throughout that this becoming freer is only possible through our interactions with others, by which we feel joy, meet our basic needs for survival and comfort, acquire common notions, become more capable of thinking and acting adequately, and come to understand nature and our place within it. The strength of these relations is a political matter, and the definitions I will now make of conatus, power and desire will help guide subsequent chapters as we pursue the problem of collective freedom.

§2.2 What is a Conatus?

Spinoza's account of the conatus, the essential striving of each thing to persevere in its own being, is the foundation of ethical life. 'Natural right' is Spinoza's preferred *nom de guerre*

when presenting his conatus doctrine in the TTP (as outlined in §1.3), and its use in Chapter 16 is so obviously couched in Hobbesian preoccupations about the state of nature and social contract that one cannot immediately discern its original features. Fortunately, the *Ethics* is much more incisive in its definition of this fundamental power that strives to preserve itself, and it is to that I turn.

This section will not attempt to give a comprehensive explanation of theories of self-preservation in early modern philosophy, nor the foundational claims that geometrically precede it regarding substance monism, immanence, mind-body parallelism or the three kinds of knowledge. Such a task, though important, is too expansive for a thesis chapter and has been accomplished elsewhere.⁴⁵ My method will instead identify salient features of the conatus argument and its derivation in this section and, from that, account for freedom and power in the following section (§2.3), and desire and the affects afterwards (§§2.4-5). Through defining the conatus, a common concern in the literature, I will then begin constructing the chief argument of this chapter, that while desire's emergence in passive affects and the imagination renders it vulnerable to the forms of servitude identified in §1.2, the underlying criterion of power manifested by our conatus gives us sufficient information to understand our desires and increase our capabilities. This awareness develops through the strength and diversity of our relations with others.

Spinoza's conatus doctrine is presented in four propositions (E3p6-p9) at the beginning of Part 3, and is derived from only four previous propositions, two somewhat indirectly. It has a foundational role in Part 3, which addresses the origin and role of the affects, defined as the mind's ideas of the modifications or affections of the body, which

⁴⁵ Being the foundation of Spinoza's ethics, the conatus has necessarily been subject to many readings. I rely primarily on Viljanen, 2011; Garrett, 2002; and Lin, 2004; but the account is informed by a wider range of invaluable sources, including Barbone, 2002; Bennett, 1984; Bove, 1996; Carriero, 2006; Curley, 1988; Deleuze, 1990; Della Rocca, 1996 and 2003; Garber, 1994; Harvey, 2012; James, 2014; Kisner, 2011; Koistinen, 2014; LeBuffe, 2010a; Marshall, 2014; Matheron, 1988; Nadler, 2014; Sévérac, 2005; Wolfson, 1962; and Youpa, 2003.

involve an increase or decrease in its power of acting (3df3, 3p11). These are states that correlate to the individual's experience of their own power. In Part 1, Spinoza presents a monist, necessitarian, and determinist account of substance, and Part 2 presents its implications as they relate to the human individual, understood as a collection of finite modes manifesting through the parallel attributes of thought and extension as a mind and a body, whose capacity for understanding is then determined.⁴⁶ In the scholia and appendices of both (e.g. 1p33s2, 1app, 2p3s, 2p35s, 2p48-p49), Spinoza wages a digressive war against the belief in an absolute faculty of free will and divine teleology, and the anthropocentric ignorance arising therefrom. Given that he does not impute any meaningful motivational power to the will, how can human beings – merely finite modes, determined by forces beyond their control – have any kind of agency whatsoever?⁴⁷ Unless Spinoza can describe an internal motivational force and a capability to cultivate an awareness of it, he will be left with a cold, atomistic account of life as merely colliding forces, where power is indiscriminately but causally distributed.⁴⁸

Spinoza's supposition of a primary principle of self-preservation in nature was already familiar to his readers, being then a 'commonplace of popular wisdom' as Wolfson puts it (1962, II, 196). The Latin term *conatus* originated with the Stoics, chiefly Cicero, who observed an instinctive principle of self-preservation in animals across nature. Cicero himself

⁴⁶ Spinoza's *necessitarianism* states that whatever is, was necessary (or rather, there is no other way what is possible could be otherwise, following 1p33). His *determinism* proceeds similarly: all effects necessarily follow from their causes (thus barring any free will, divine or otherwise, following 1p28). It follows therefore that any faculty of free will is impossible (see §2.5.2 for detail). The excellent research produced on Spinoza's metaphysics is far vaster than a note can satisfactorily acknowledge (see Bibliography), but my account is most indebted to Bennett, 1984; Deleuze, 1988; Della Rocca, 2008; Guerout, 1969 and 1974; and Melamed, 2013b.

⁴⁷ I use 'human beings' throughout instead of 'humanity' – it is an awkward phrasing, but reflects Spinoza's own criticism of reliance on 'universals', frequent in Aristotle and Scholastic discourses, which he calls 'beings of reason' (2p48-49; cf. Ep 2, KV 2.4 n12, CM 1.1). Note the *conatus* claims that 'Each thing...' rather than 'Everything...': Spinoza's claim is that there is no abstract faculty of desire or will, only particular willings and desirings (e.g. 1p31s, 2p48s; cf. Sévérac, 1998, 42-3).

⁴⁸ This dynamic view of reality as bodies interacting, opposing forces colliding against one another, is termed the 'contest' view of force by Gabbey, which he demonstrates as particularly influential on contemporary physics (1980, 243-4; cf. Carriero, 2005, 133; Viljanen, 2011, 90).

(1931 IV.7 §16; cf. III.5) uncritically restates the earlier Aristotelian-Peripatetic account of *horme* (impulse), and similar statements of an elemental law of self-preservation are repeated by medieval Christian philosophers (e.g. Augustine, Aquinas, Duns Scotus), and Jewish philosophers (Gersonides, Morteira).⁴⁹ These accounts all refer to animal life however, nor do they confer any agency to this law, as they share another conception of free will also in Descartes, which Spinoza was determined to disprove. Spinoza's model of conatus was equally informed by the New Science of Galileo and Descartes, which replaced Aristotle's teleological account of striving to actualise an end with a physical law of inertia, whereby 'what is once in motion always continues to move', unless prevented by some other cause, the first law of nature in Descartes' *Principles of Philosophy* (1985, II.37; cf. Hobbes, 1998b, I.2). Yet these accounts tended to describe this inherent force or power of self-preservation in terms of motion, and were thus unable to explain how a thing continues or perseveres in a given state and resists change, a criticism Leibniz makes of Descartes (1989, 172). This physical element is important for Spinoza: sidestepping Part 2's account of human minds and bodies (the one relevant proposition, 2p13, is curiously unlinked – see Garrett, 1994 for conjecture why), Part 3 begins on the properties of *things* (rather than say human souls, or animals), from which the conatus is derived. However, this mechanistic notion of striving as a form of continued perseverance in a given state is crucial for human desire, as will become clear.

The conatus doctrine, introduced and defined in E3p6, combines both classic and modern senses outlined. 'Each thing, insofar as it is in itself, strives [*conatur*] to persist in its own being'. Applied to living creatures, there is nothing in the second half of the proposition that Cicero would disagree with. Nor, on the face of it, does the added 'each thing' present

⁴⁹ See Wolfson, 1962, II, 195-204, who remains most comprehensive in his survey of sources. On the influence of Gersonides, see W.Z. Harvey, 2012; and for a more up-to-date and incisive study of medieval sources for Spinoza's conception of power and conatus, see Viljanen, 2011, chs. 3-4.

any difficulties for Descartes or Hobbes. The ‘insofar as it is in itself’ (*quantum in se est*) may cause more trouble. Della Rocca (1996, 194-206) questions whether it is even necessary or merely an ‘equivalence’ of different claims, and Viljanen (2011, 72) wonders how any mode can be said to exist in itself, given that it necessarily exists through others. Cohen (1964, 147) however observes that this Latin phrase originates in Lucretius and was used by Descartes and Newton to describe something ‘by nature’ or ‘without external force’. For a thing to strive *insofar as it is in itself* is to strive as a feature of its nature, without being affected by external causes. Its ability to strive is determined by its power to inhere or remain in itself, its ‘*being in*’ itself, as Garrett notes (2002, 135), through which it is and is conceived through. A thing’s elemental striving indicates and occurs through its power.

We can also note in passing that this striving is an efficient and not a final cause (it strives *as* its nature, rather than *for* its self-preservation, a claim I will justify in §2.5.1). E3p7 restates this definition of the conatus, adding that this elemental striving is the ‘actual essence’ of the thing itself, and 3p8 adds that this essence does not involve ‘finite time’, given that duration would necessarily internally limit its striving. A thing’s essential striving is equivalent to its power (3p7dm) by which it is defined and individuated. A thing by essence strives – as Viljanen puts it, we are all essentially ‘powerful strivers’ (2011, 102) – and this peculiar confluence of modern physical forces and medieval metaphysical/essential being is best appreciated when we turn to the derivation of 3p6, and how it leads to 3p7 and beyond.

E3p6 is premised on two propositions that immediately precede it, and its derivation has led to disquiet about its structural soundness. Through examining the cause of this confusion, and various attempts to solve it (e.g. Garrett’s inherence, or Viljanen’s dynamic essentialism, or as presuming teleology, as discussed in §2.5.1), we will be able to distinguish the relationship between power and freedom that underpins the conatus. 3p4 states nothing can destroy itself except through an external cause, and 3p5 adds that things are ‘of

a contrary nature' insofar as one can destroy the other. Bennett is most critical of the construction of the conatus argument; the first proposition is 'otiose', the second 'drastically ambiguous', and the whole derivation 'glaringly fallacious' (1984, §57; cf. Della Rocca, 1996, 206; Garber, 1994, 60). For him, it stands on four weak equivocations of terms that are not defined, and only subsequently defined by later propositions, heaping confusion on confusion (Bennett, 1984, §§54-57; cf. Della Rocca, 2008, 137-141; Garrett, 2002, 128-9). Bennett finds Spinoza's conative explanation of suicide weak, and though more charitable to Spinoza's concision here, Curley (1988, 102-110) and Della Rocca (1996, 199-200) have added more examples of ticking time-bombs and lit candles that indicate how things can be destroyed by internal causes (external forces *are* still involved here, but this is not the point). A natural predisposition to self-preservation may be acceptable, but not one founded on the logical impossibility of someone rationally deciding to take their own life – Seneca the most common example (e.g. Bennett, 1984, §56). If Spinoza has no coherent explanation for the conatus, the source of all activity, organic or otherwise, then he cannot explain the possibility of agency and freedom in a deterministic universe.

Bennett and Della Rocca's criticisms stems from their meticulous focus on 3p4-p6, at the expense of another two propositions used by 3p6, being 1p25c and 1p34. Defending the conatus, Garrett (2002, 128-35), Lin (2004, 25-9) and Allison (1987, 131-3) have used the latter to reinforce its derivation. These two are vital for the account, as they explain why the being of modes is, in essence, power, and how such power is limited in scale. 1p25c states that '[s]ingular things are modes by which God's attributes are expressed in a certain and determinate way', and 1p34 adds that 'God's power is his essence itself'. Finite things, be they stones, sparrows or Seneca, express God's power, modifying it in a specific and limited way. God is by essence power, so finite modes exist as they actualise God's power under a certain attribute. Hence the conatus doctrine indicates that, in terms of their essential definition, things cannot act in ways that are self-destructive (3p4), and will resist contrary

forces so as to remain in being (3p5). They express this essential power in a way that strives towards persevering in being, insofar as it is not determined by external causes (3p6; cf. Viljanen, 2011, 103).⁵⁰ Thus power and its particular realisation in finite modes is the basis of the conatus.

Bennett raises another pertinent problem though. It is still unclear how one moves from a negative inability to destroy oneself to a positive striving to persevere in existence (1984, §57.4). Matheron claims it is in the necessity of acting – ‘if its nature is to produce certain effects, it is certain that these effects will agree with its nature and therefore tend to preserve it’ (1988, 11). In itself, Bennett is right to dismiss this ‘activity’ as insufficiently demonstrated and somewhat meaningless (1984, §57.4). However, when connected to 1p25c and 1p34, we can extrapolate another characteristic of power that enables a recognition of its freedom. Singular things are modifications of God’s power, under the form of any given attribute (substance consists of an infinity of these, 1df6), existing in a certain and determined way. To understand how such things exist as modifications of absolutely infinite power, I will now consider four readings from which the nature of activity and empowerment becomes clearer.

The importance of *expression* has been highlighted forthrightly by Deleuze, who identifies a marginal concept in the *Ethics* to explain how substance’s (undefined, beyond 1df6) ‘expression’ of essences through attributes, and attributes’ expression through finite modes, offers a way of re-conceiving Spinoza’s ontology as founded on the unfolding power of finite modes (1990, 13-14). These modes do not merely manifest substance, but also constitute it – they are ‘expressive precisely insofar as they imply the same qualitative forms that constitute the essence of substance’ (186). Though the argument is methodologically

⁵⁰ We can meet the critics of the conatus halfway: 3p4-p5 function like stepping stones to 3p6, premises that enable 3p6 whose own inferences are understood retrospectively.

precarious, being so heavily weighted on this under-defined concept, it helps illustrate our interpretation, that reality is an intrinsic and total sum of power, of causes producing effects, expressed or realised by the activity of modes, under an infinity of attributes including thought and extension. Lin observes a Neoplatonic heritage in the *conatus*, as modes manifest the nature of their causes, emanating God's power through their conative strivings (2004, 31-40).⁵¹ Garrett by contrast described earlier how modes *inhere* or *be* in substance, and this inherence is akin to their power. Viljanen identifies a geometrically causal model of power or 'dynamic essentialism', whereby things are by essence powerful causers, and through their essences dynamically 'produce effects and determine each other's power of acting' (2011, 53). Relying heavily on 1p34, he observes that for Spinoza, God's power is his essence itself, and through this essence or power, is the cause of himself and all things. Power is the 'intrinsic causal activity of all things' (2011, 62), and this power is the means by which God's essence is realised. Thus – to resolve Bennett and Matheron's disagreement on activity – God is intrinsically active, and this power is actual, being the ability to cause effects.

Whether one says they express, manifest, *inhere* in or dynamically realise God's power (Spinoza's thought allows for much equivocation), we can identify that power is God's essence, and nothing but the totality of substance, and it is intrinsically causally active. To the extent that the power of each thing is limited and determined to differing extents, it exists by degrees, and thus there are degrees of power by which we can measure a thing's capacity to think or act independently.⁵² Our power is not one of Aristotelian potential nor metaphysical contemplation of truths, but in thinking and acting, a natural power, and one that is entirely intelligible, like all other things in nature (cf. Viljanen, 2011, 177; Della Rocca,

⁵¹ Curley highlights Suarez (in Spinoza, 1985, 223), whereas Carriero, 1991 argues for Avicenna's influence. There is a good if overstated case for the influence of emanation on Spinoza's account of God's productive causality in Wolfson, 1962, I, 372-5; and an insightful discussion of Neoplatonist and Scholastic influences in Deleuze, 1988, chs. 3 and 11, and Viljanen, 2011, chs.2-3.

⁵² On this insight of power existing by degrees, I am indebted to Kisner, 2011, 32-4; one finds a similar if less developed account in Bennett, 1984, §72.3; Della Rocca, 2008, 187; Garrett, 2002, 142; Lin, 2004, 46, and 2006, 405; Steinberg, 2009, 41; and Viljanen, 2011, 66.

2008, 4). As singular things, we realise being through our striving power, in a particular and determined way, predisposed to persevere in existence.

By that token, it is in our interest to become as powerful as we can. The key question of whether this is through an ‘egoistic’ manner at the expense of others, or through a collective endeavour of mutual empowerment, is introduced in §2.7, and is fundamental to the argument of this thesis. But we can offer a couple more foundational premises from which to address this question. Given that the essential striving of each thing is determined in a particular way, the power that properly belongs to us is that which arises from our own nature, without regard to (or in spite of) external forces around us. The intention of this section has been to demonstrate how this is the case, and why. In this way Matheron describes ‘autonomy’ in Spinoza as a power of acting, or ‘the individual’s aptitude to do what follows from the laws of its nature alone’ (1988, 50). It is an intrinsic capability of a thing to determine its own direction to the greatest degree it can. It is realised in ‘exercising one’s power mainly either in being a complete cause of one’s *own* states’, as Viljanen puts it (2011, 80-81), or adequately causing effects that inhere in other things.⁵³ Yet this relies on concepts of power, freedom and autonomy that, being entirely self-caused, seem beyond possibility for finite things like humans, jeopardising their relevance. While the *conatus* describes the essence of each singular thing, we must determine why some things are said to be more powerful or free than others, from which to grasp how human beings can do *what they can* to become as powerful as their capability allows.

⁵³ Spinoza’s definition of *adequate* is technical and purposeful, and refers to an intrinsic, objective understanding. Applied to an idea (e.g. E2df4), it has all the intrinsic characteristics of a true idea, without reference to an external object. Applied to a cause (3df1), its effect can be clearly and distinctly perceived through it alone, that is, intrinsically and truthfully understood without reference to an external object. Humans cannot be adequate causes given our natural vulnerability to external forces that produce changes in us, and so we cannot ever escape the passions that these external effects produce.

§2.3 Freedom and Power

Spinoza gives a definition of freedom early in *Ethics* which he uses consistently throughout his thought. In E1df7 he describes a ‘free’ (*liber*) thing as that ‘which exists from the necessity of its nature alone, and is determined to act by itself alone’ (cf. Ep 58’s similar definition). Standing in contrast is compulsion or necessity, in which a thing is determined ‘by another to exist and to produce an effect in a certain and determinate manner’. Our account of the *conatus* earlier should alert us to where finite modes fall in this schema: determined to act in a particular way, their existence is seemingly not free but necessary, and so freedom does not seem possible for us. 1p17 – Spinoza’s case for immanence, concluded in 1p18 – and its second corollary argue that only God is a ‘free cause’, acting from the necessity of his own nature alone,⁵⁴ from which infinitely everything follows and within which everything is contained. From this, 1p29s presents Spinoza’s distinction between *natura naturans* (what is ‘in itself and conceived through itself’ alone, i.e. God) and *natura naturata* (everything which exists from the necessity of God’s nature, i.e. modes; cf. §1.7). 1p32 further establishes that God has no free will, and will itself is only an erroneous ‘mode of thinking’, given that every effect follows necessarily from its cause, linking back to God. Instead, God acts from the necessity of his essence as an absolutely infinite, free and perfect being (1p33; 1p8, 1p11), and this essence is his power (1p34), from which follows the necessarily existing activity of causes and effects (1p35-p36).

This concept of freedom as being self-determined to exist by one’s nature alone corresponds to Spinoza’s definition of adequacy (see note 53 above), and both states described are seemingly beyond human acquisition. Yet in Part 4 Spinoza describes a ‘free

⁵⁴ Using the conventions of his time, Spinoza refers to substance most often as God, the closest term to capturing the total power of the reality from which all essences and existing things follow. He uses the term ‘his’ too but it should be clear that Spinoza has no anthropomorphic notion of God, and ‘its’ would be more grammatically correct. For sake of clarity however, I repeat Spinoza’s usage.

man' who acts from his own nature alone (4p67-p73), and Part 5 presents the 'freedom of the human mind', and its eternity through the intuitive third kind of knowledge (5p32). This has led Bennett (1984, §72.3) to observe three different occurrences of freedom in Spinoza that correspond to these parts: God's freedom, and that of the free man, both being self-caused and the latter a 'theoretically convenient limiting case', alongside a third freedom from the passions that Part 5 attempts with its 'psychotherapy' in 5p10.⁵⁵ I think it is possible instead to conceive these as one kind of freedom, and one that is possible for finite modes. Drawing on our findings from §2.2, each singular thing strives to persevere in being in a particular and determined way, and this striving is the essence of that thing, as a modification of God's power. As finite modes we are realisations of God's freedom to the extent that we are active and not passive, that is to say, limited or overwhelmed by external forces. Our freedom is therefore in becoming as powerful and as active as we can, and thus at our most active and adequately self-directed, we *are* realisations of God's freedom (or, in less theologically-burdensome but equivalent terms, realisations of nature's power; see 2p11c, cf. Deleuze, 1988, 69-70; Kisner, 2011, 18).⁵⁶

This comes through understanding and accepting the necessity of what follows from God's nature (5p10s; cf. 2p49s). By contrast, the human illusion of freedom as free will arises out of ignorance of what causes our actions, voluntarism's weak basis, concisely put, thereby

⁵⁵ An unfortunate term that is anachronistic and misleading, just as claims that Spinoza's ethics is 'egoistic' (see §2.7), but one that persists in subsequent commentaries, and for that reason alone is used here. Its use originates in Bennett, 1984 (e.g. ch. 14), and subsequent proponents of a 'psychotherapy' reading include DeBrabander (2007, ch. 2), LeBuffe (2010a, 190), Pereboom (1994) and Smith (1997, 135), which align in asserting a case for overcoming our passions and the errors these produce to achieve a state of individual psychological tranquillity.

⁵⁶ Deleuze links freedom to becoming more powerful in the Glossary included in *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*, but this is a marginal feature of his predominant argument that Spinoza is an affirmative philosopher of joy. My debt is particularly to Kisner, 2011, who builds an incisive argument for the priority of freedom in Spinoza's ethics, understood in terms of self-determination. Our chief difference is that whereas Kisner considers political freedom as a 'subset' (9) of the individual's total freedom, I argue that it is the foundation and basis for an individual becoming freer, given our necessary vulnerability to passive affects and the imagination, and our dependence on social relations from birth. This analysis is introduced in §2.6.

construing them to be self-caused and freely chosen, like the stone of §1.7. Our power is equivalent to our virtue (4df8), and our freedom equivalent to our rationality (4p67-p68) – thus our freedom as finite modes is in living reasonably, in ways that preserve our being and increase our powers, with the corresponding affects of joy this produces (4p18s; 4p24). There is a particular freedom Spinoza describes as *beatitudo*, experienced by the mind alone, outlined in Part 5 (e.g. 5pref; cf. 2p49s). Whereas Bennett is famously caustic (1984, §85), and Wilson (1996, 129) wonders whether it was included by editorial error, I understand *beatitudo* as the mind's attainment of a greater proportion of adequate ideas which are universal and eternal truths – thus, there is nothing of *my* mind that endures, only the adequate ideas it was a momentary realisation of in its contemplation.⁵⁷ The 'perfection' (5p33) and 'intellectual love of God' (5p36) that arise from the third kind of knowledge (5p32) are the mind's experience of a self-determined, adequate activity that correlates to God's actual power. Although the latter features of this freedom are described in human terms, they are based on an ontology of power that describes things in general. While the *absolute* freedom of being totally self-caused and unaffected by external forces *is* impossible for organisations of finite modes, they can experience a *relative* freedom when their activity correlates to it, in activity that is reasonable and conducive to the perseverance of their being (a 'scalar' freedom, Kisner calls it: 2011, 32).

§2.3.1 Individual Powers

With freedom clarified, we can complete the discussion of power with a peculiar problem. What distinguishes the conatus of Spinoza from that of his fingernail, or the speck of glass beneath it from grinding lenses one morning? After all, each are composed of finite modes that persevere in being as certain and determined modifications of God's total power. To

⁵⁷ For more sympathetic attention to *beatitudo*, see Nadler (2001, ch. 5), Garrett (2009), Viljanen (2014), and Schmaltz (2015).

avoid the sort of confusion that has subsequently hazed around panpsychism, we must define what is an individual, and how its parts cohere and persist in a singular being or collection of power, a whole greater than the sum of its parts. In this way we will finally have an ontological basis from which to separate the power-freedom of individuals from the more general ‘field metaphysic’ (Bennett, 1984, §22.6) of forces from which they arise. For while Spinoza does distinguish the particular individuality of the haemoglobin cell or ‘worm in the blood’ from the higher-order individuality of the bloodstream (Ep 32; cf. Rice, 1990, 286-7), or the human in which it flows beyond that, we need a general foundation for determining individuality in the first place.

Here 2p13, or the physical digression as it is sometimes known, will help. 2df7 defines ‘singular things’ as finite and with a determinate existence, and adds that numerous individuals can compose a singular thing so long as they are the combined cause of a single effect. While other uses suggest the individual is a particular being under a genus,⁵⁸ this leads to the remarkable implication that a singular thing (that which, following 3p6, conatively strives) can include collections of human individuals acting in concert to produce a singular effect (see §3.2.2 for a discussion of that). But how does a singular thing or individual persevere in its being? 2p13 initially proposes that the body is the object of the idea of the human mind, and nothing else, and thus an individual is a union of a mind and a body, being modified under two parallel attributes by which it is expressed. To understand this union, Spinoza accounts for the nature of bodies, but his account presents a theory of complexity that explains why some things are more powerful than others, or why Seneca is capable of more activity than a stone.

⁵⁸ See 1p8s2, and a lesser extent 2a3 and 2p11. These inferences are in part based on the *Nagelate Schriften* [NS] translation of *Ethics*, whose divergences from the original Latin were incorporated into Gebhardt’s edition. Curley (in Spinoza, 1985, 405-7) warns against relying too heavily on the NS.

2p13s begins by noting that the human body is intelligible according to the same laws determining other bodies in nature. But Spinoza adds a criterion that both ideas and objects can differ from others to the extent that they contain more ‘reality’ and are thus more ‘excellent’. This reality corresponds to their power (2df6 earlier equivocates ‘reality’ and ‘perfection’). To avoid a tautology like ‘power makes things more powerful’,⁵⁹ this reality/power applies to human minds and bodies to the extent that they are *a)* capable of affecting and being affected, as much from their own nature as possible i.e. independently, which *b)* indicates their complexity, composed of many parts that combine into one individual that collectively produces a single effect. The argument is condensed for clarity of exposition, but can be unpacked:

a) refers to a ‘proportion’ between bodies and minds, that ‘as a body is more capable than others of doing many things at once, or being acted on in many ways at once, so its mind is more capable than others of perceiving many things at once’ (2p13s). The mind’s capacity to perceive, through which it develops knowledge, extends only as far as the body’s range of interactions with other bodies. These interactions can either be *active* or *passive*, that is to say, either involving ourselves as an adequate cause, *or* as a partial cause or not a cause at all. Both affecting or being affected by other bodies is advantageous, as 4p38-p39 confirms, but Spinoza qualifies that as a body’s actions ‘depend *more* on itself alone’ (my emphasis), so its mind is capable of understanding distinctly. This *more* confirms that Spinoza envisions power as something measurable in degrees of activity, or what Deleuze calls ‘intensity’ of power (1990, 417-8).

⁵⁹ This tautology comes to mind when reading works advocating the intrinsically liberatory power of multitudes along grounds of constituent power – that as there are many, so they are powerful (and predisposed to egalitarian democracy and autonomy), for instance in Dunford (2011) and Del Lucchese (2015). Though sharp-edged, I hope that this tautology can be used to think more rigorously about democracy and power.

b) refers to the nature of bodies themselves, and the extent to which they can be capable of many interactions. 2p13l1 defines simple bodies in terms of ‘motion and rest’, determined to exist in these varying states by other bodies, in a causal chain that continues to infinity (2p13l3). But these bodies move up in complexity when a given number of them combine into one unified body or individual, defined by its maintenance of a ‘certain fixed manner’ (2p13a2”df) or ‘ratio of motion and rest’ (2p13l5), communicated internally among its constitutive parts. Thus a composite body or individual can contain multiple parts, even of a different nature, which change over time.⁶⁰

Therefore an individual like a human being is a composite union of bodies, which are in turn compositions of other bodies, that maintains and shares in producing a common activity. An individual’s power is determined by the extent of its interactions, and an individual is more powerful to the extent that these interactions result from its own self-determined activity. Yet there is no limit to what counts as an individual for Spinoza. So long as each retains its ratio of motion and rest (its physical identity), the speck of glass, the fingernail and Spinoza each count as individuals of varying degrees of complexity and power. Individuation increases in complexity as composite bodies form higher-order composite bodies up to infinity, so that ‘we shall easily conceive that the whole of nature is one individual, whose parts, i.e., all bodies, vary in infinite ways, without any change to the whole individual’ (2p13l7dm). The individual *is* to the extent that it operates *as*, I argue, and this sense of a collective operation is crucial, and will become clearer as we proceed.⁶¹

What determines an individual is its complexity and capability to realise the conative power of which it is already a manifestation. To the extent that they are as active as possible,

⁶⁰ A more robust solution to the ship of Theseus paradox, or the continuity of personal identity, than Locke’s reliance on memory and consciousness in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*.

⁶¹ See also Barbone, 2002; Bennett, 1984, §54.3; Garrett, 1994; Gueroult, 1974, ch. 6; Matheron, 1988, 38-43; and Rice, 1990. In §3.2.2 I present the interpretative controversy that has arisen out of this section regarding political individuals and my own solution.

and as much a cause of their own mental and physical states as possible in their interactions with others, then individuals are said to be powerful. By contrast, to the extent that they passively accede to or are overwhelmed by external forces and the mental and physical states they produce, they are not a cause of their own activity or of activity in others with which they interact, and thus are said to be passive, weak, and in a state of servitude, like that analysed in the last chapter.

§2.3.2 *Potentia and Potestas*

I have taken lengths to construct this account of capability, as I consider it necessary to understand what is most significant about Spinoza's discussion of power. For while Spinoza has multiple terms for power that connote its different features, its most common usage is *potentia*, which I claim refers to a *capability* to act. God's *potentia* is his freedom or capability to act from the necessity of his own nature alone (1p34, 1p36, 2p7c), yet individuals like human beings also realise this *potentia* when they act according to the dictates of reason (4df8). This human form of *potentia* describes an internal capacity rather than the quality of a given interaction, much like the proportion of motion and rest or self-determining conatus outlined in this section and the last. *Potentia* specifically refers to an individual's capability of imagination (2p17s) and thinking (2p21s), their power to control the affects (3pref), or their conatus (3p7dm), virtue (3pref, 4df8), essence (5p9dm), or what is able to or necessarily exists (1p11, 1p34, 1p36, 3p8dm). 3p11 is most succinct, referring to the body's power of acting (*agendi potentia*) and the mind's corresponding power of thinking (*cogitandi potentia*): both indicate an internal capability, and this sense is used across the remainder of *Ethics*.⁶²

⁶² E.g. 3pref, 3df3, 3post1, 3p12-p13, 3p15, 3p19-p20, 3p27, 3p53-p59, 3agd, 4pref, 4p3-p5, 4p8dm, 4p20dm, 4p30-p31, 4p35c, 4p37s-s2, 5p25dm. There is no real distinction between *potentia* and *potentia agendi* or *cogitandi*, given that power is necessarily expressed in actual effects (cf. Kisner, 2011, 20; Deleuze, 1990, 93).

Yet there is also the power connoted by *potestas*, referring most often to a thing's power over itself. The human mind is said to have a weak (3p2) but viable *potestas* to control the affects and bring about effects from its own nature (2p49s, 4df8, 5pref, 5p4, 5p10, 5p42dm; TP 2.7), just as God has power to produce effects that follow from his nature (1p17s, 1p33s, 1p35, 2p3), or a state has power over its subjects to compel them to obey laws that realise the common good (4p37s2; TTP Pref, TTP 16 *passim*). Again, this refers to an intrinsic ability to determine (or at least steer) some of the effects that arise from oneself as a cause. Developing one's *potentia* requires some *potestas* over ourselves, to respond as actively as we can to external forces and the affects they produce in us – a practical programme for freedom we address in §2.6. For now, it is enough to note that freedom is in power, and this power incorporates *potentia* and *potestas* to assist its realisation. Thus, contra Negri (2003, 72) and Del Lucchese (2009, 186 n52), an individual's *potentia* is enabled by its *potestas*, and it would be misleading to claim that Spinoza presents a liberatory form of power (*potentia*) against a repressive state force (*potestas*).⁶³ It is essential that we do away with this misconception now, in order to accurately assess the merits of Spinoza's political theory of collective power, which attributes a positive and fundamental role to political organisations capable of steering, determining and realising their own inherent power against a plethora of external forces that would sooner compel them into dissolution and passivity.

Through Spinoza's somewhat abstruse reasoning, we are now able to recognise what is significant about his definition of power: it *is* reality, through which all things are

⁶³ Others have noted the *potentia/potestas* distinction, but without the same degree of criticism or attention to its occurrences in the text, for instance Balibar, 2008, 88; Barbone, 2002, 102-3; Saar, 2014, 19; Van Bunge et al., 2011, 293-6; Viljanen, 2011, 64; and Curley in Spinoza, 2016, 649-650. Negri's distinction stems from its courageous but, I would argue, untenable refusal to endorse any form of higher-order organisation that might become hierarchical, and its source material in the text is far too small and unscrupulously selective. That said, as a work of modern-day Spinozism, rather than Spinoza scholarship, there are few works of greater *animositas* and *fortitudo* than the prison-produced *L'anomalia selvaggia*. The case for higher-order political organisations that avoid some of the pitfalls of hierarchical organisation will be introduced in §3.2.3 and returned to in §5.6.

expressed, as causers of effects that persevere their own being. Things become more or less powerful to the extent that they are *as* adequate causes of their own states or of others as they can be. While my account has so far drawn on a range of secondary critical material, my argument is the first to fuse together the reliance of conatus on substantial, immanent power with the physics and composition of forces, from which to now assess the ethical implications of striving humans as we passively or actively persevere in existence in relation to other external forces, and from that how to maximise joyous encounters and develop common notions through which we become freer. It is an ambitious argument, but these last two sections provide an ontological foundation with which to discuss human desire, affects and imagination. Establishing this ontology of power prior to discussing human desire and the affects is crucial, because Spinoza considers human beings as a subset of nature and without any special privileges. As E3pref confirms, it is an error to consider ourselves as a 'kingdom within a kingdom' (contra Descartes' account of intellect and free will mastering the passions), and Spinoza resolves to consider human actions and appetites as if they were 'lines, planes or bodies' with certain and determinate laws. He retains this ontology in the two political works, as Chapters 3 and 4 will indicate. We can lastly note in passing that this renders Spinoza's ontology intrinsically political, and while we can agree with Peden (2015, 99-100) that 'ontologies cannot entail the content of political positions', we can reject his conclusion that Spinoza's ontology offers only ethical, not political, positions. Power pertains to the very basis of the *polis*, and what empowers individuals is a fundamentally political concern, as Spinoza was readily aware.

I have now developed an account of conatus, freedom and power as they relate to things, and can explain why things like human beings strive, and how this striving individuates them, but we are not yet able to account for the specificity of human experience. We are still to determine how we become more powerful, what the extent of our powers is, or even how we experience our conatus. This problem can be illustrated with

one of Spinoza's favourite analogies, a ship assailed by the stormy seas. Facing the right direction of the wind, its sails compel it towards port. Yet without a knowledge of the winds, the boat's structure or the mechanism of the sails, or how to steer the vessel, it remains largely passive and of limited capability. This account of conatus too remains at the mercy of external forces, its own internal weaknesses, and a reliance on random, passive, fortuitous encounters. To address this question, I turn to how the conatus is affectively experienced as desire, and from that, develop how this desire can in turn empower us.

§2.4 Defining Desire

Given that human beings are no 'kingdom within a kingdom', and their appetites and actions are just another subset of nature, intelligible to reason, any practical measures towards our freedom still appear vague. Yes, we can extend the frequency of our interactions and try to be as much a cause of our own activity as possible, but as collections of striving matter and ideas, what might this actually amount to in our daily interactions, other than some crude Hobbesian apology for greedy self-interest and the avoidance of death (e.g. Hobbes, 1998b, epistle dedicatory)? How reliable is such a limited model of freedom given that what we perceive of those interactions is necessarily formed by passive affects and the imagination? Yet in Part 2 of *Ethics*, Spinoza has given a rigorous account of causality (2p1-p16), the roles of intellect and imagination (2p17-p23), and the nature of adequate knowledge (2p24-p40), which serves as the basis from which he outlines three kinds of knowledge (2p40s2), wherein his peculiar vision of human freedom arises. Spinoza's goal across his works is the liberation of human beings, and his means for accomplishing this is broadly consistent throughout all, I argue, be it in liberating the human mind (TIE, *Ethics*), or a people (TTP), or a state (TP), with varying implications for differing groups, based on their internal level of activity.⁶⁴ At

⁶⁴ Consistent but not identical: another original claim of this thesis is that Spinoza re-evaluates and transforms what he imagines as collective freedom and power in the TTP and TP: see §3.6 and §4.2.

the foundation of this is *desire*, that is, the conscious experience of conatus that human beings have.

This section introduces the problem of what this consciousness amounts to, how the affects not only indicate but also motivate our conatus, and how our necessary immersion in forms of imagination-based knowledge lead to confusion about what our desires are, resulting in a host of familiar and philosophical problems, from the belief in free will or a human-like deity to our inability to follow-through on our good intentions.⁶⁵ This section will be the keystone between our earlier ontology of power and the later account of the individual's empowerment through desire. It will reconstruct a definition of desire in Spinoza, logically followed by three stress tests derived from various critical studies, to determine its conceptual robustness: teleology (§2.5.1), akrasia (§2.5.2), and the extent to which desire is itself a passive affect (§2.5.3). The resulting concept of desire will be distinct from (but a species of) the conatus, with its own particular features of empowerment and experience. Together these two associated sections (§2.4 and §2.5) are the longest in the chapter, but its most important: §2.6 following will simply present in a concise and affirmative manner the concept of desire mined by these disputations, below.

Spinoza's account of desire (*cupiditas*) follows from the conatus doctrine (3p6-p8), and is relatively uncomplex, being established in two propositions (3p9s, 3p11), and given a summary definition later (3ad1).⁶⁶ 3p9dm establishes that the mind strives to persevere in its being, and has a conatus constituted of both adequate and inadequate ideas. This follows plausibly from Spinoza's parallelism (2p11, 2p23, 3p3dm), with the consequence that the mind is necessarily conscious (*conscientia*) of its striving through the body's affections (given

⁶⁵ Deleuze (1988, 20) memorably reframes these problems as the 'triple illusion' of consciousness, of final causes, free will and theology. I take the latter as a species of domination, and the first two as servitude as defined in the last chapter.

⁶⁶ Cf. 3p56-p59, 4p15-p18, 4p37, 4p60-61, 4app1-4, 5p4s, 5p26, and 5p28, where Spinoza develops this definition of desire to construct an ethics of freedom – passages analysed in §2.5.

that the mind and body are manifestations of one individual in two unified attributes, of which the mind is the ‘idea’ of the body). These affections can produce ideas which are called affects, and as outlined earlier, these affects are experienced when the body undergoes a transition to a greater or lesser degree of power.⁶⁷ 3p9s then uses terms familiar to readers to distinguish how this conatus manifests in human beings: when related only to minds, it is ‘will’ (*voluntas*), and when it relates to mind and body together, it is ‘appetite’ (*appetitus*). Appetite is ‘the very essence of man, from whose nature there necessarily follow those things that promote his preservation’, and thus determining that individual to undertake the things that will preserve its conatus. Appetite would therefore seem to be the conatus as manifested in a human being, but Spinoza then adds a definition of desire (*cupiditas*) that incorporates human consciousness of these appetites, and so is ‘appetite together with consciousness [*conscientia*] of the appetite’.

This definition (I call it d_1) is crucial, I argue, as it gives Spinoza a basis for explaining how human beings can become freer that does not rely on the invalidated faculty of free will. Such a consciousness is not itself normatively liberating either, given that the mind’s striving of which it is conscious is the result of both inadequate and adequate ideas that arise from the body’s affections, which are themselves determined by the activity or passivity of that given body. The ‘consciousness’ that is desire needs a little reconstructing: using what Steinberg (2016, 72) calls the ‘biconditional formula’ of 2p23, the mind is only conscious of itself insofar as the body is affected, *and* the mind necessarily perceives these ideas. Hence consciousness is produced by the body’s affections, and the mind’s ideas of these, called affects (cf. 3df3, 3agd). An additional argument confirming desire’s intrinsically amoral character then follows (d_2): ‘we neither strive for, nor will, neither want, nor desire anything

⁶⁷ Not all affections result in affects in the mind, for instance trembling, paleness and sobbing (3p59s). The affects are also relative – one who is already an adequate cause of their own activity or in a position of great power may not experience any joy whatsoever (cf. 3agd).

because we judge it to be a good; on the contrary, we judge something to be good because we strive for it, will it, want it, and desire it'.⁶⁸ There is already some challenging interpretative work to do on this 'haunting, puzzling statement' (Bennett, 1984, §52.3), but for now we can observe that a second definition of desire as a form of consciousness produced by the ideas of our bodily affections, which determines what we value and judge as good.

Desire reappears in 3p11s with a third definition (d_3): it is now one of three primary affects, alongside joy (*laetitia*) and sadness (*tristitia*), out of which all other affects arise.⁶⁹ Whereas joy and sadness are passionate states that correspond to the mind's transition to greater or lesser perfection, that is to say, reality or power (following 2df6 earlier), the role of desire is initially unclear. It does not directly correspond to a transition in power, yet has a number of affective functions with their own capacity to determine behaviour. Thus Spinoza quickly applies it to how a mind imagines things that will increase the body's power of acting (and thus its own power) in 3p12. Again, putting critical interpretations aside for a moment, d_3 is consistent with d_1 in that desire is the mind's consciousness of its own appetites, and reflects an internal striving that can make itself more active through the imagination. Further, d_3 is also consistent with d_2 in having no morally normative character: the mind's ability to imagine *what it can* to increase the body's power of acting is only limited by the range of that body's interactions, from which its ideas are produced (following 2p13 and §2.3).

⁶⁸ Some Spinoza scholars are divided as to whether Spinoza is a moral realist or anti-realist, that is to say, whether good or bad have any intrinsic qualities beyond our desires and capabilities. On the realist side one can list Frankena (1977, 28-30), Miller (2005), Youpa particularly (2009, 2010), and Kisner (2011, 95); on the anti-realist side is Deleuze (1988, 23), Rutherford (2008, 508), Melamed (2011, 157-8), LeBuffe (2010a, 153-4), and McDonough (2011, 192). From the arguments above, it is clear that I take the anti-realist side. The debate is reconstructed in Kisner and Youpa (2014, 5).

⁶⁹ I follow Curley in translating *laetitia* as joy and *tristitia* as sadness. Descartes presented six primary passions, being Spinoza's three, alongside wonder, love and hate (see Wolfson, 1962, II, 207-9).

Thus, with a little work, the final definition of desire (d_4) that closes Part 3 causes no problems: ‘Desire is man’s very essence, insofar as it is conceived to be determined, from any given affection of it, to do something’ (3ad1). This gives desire the same definition as appetite in d_1 , but again consciousness is paramount. Appetite exists regardless of our consciousness of it (3ad1exp), whereas d_4 incorporates all forms of ‘strivings, impulses, appetites, and volitions’ as they generate affections, by which an essence is conceived to be determined to do something. Thus d_4 is consistent with d_1 - d_3 : desires are a network (one might even say environment) of affects and cognitions out of which a form of consciousness is constituted, one which provides the mind with some information regarding its own striving power, and by which it can imagine things that further increase the body’s power of acting.⁷⁰ To summarise, desire is the mental and bodily consciousness of our conatus, our striving to persevere in being. Its consciousness is constituted of bodily affections and the ideas of these, affects. It is our experience of our own striving power, insofar as it is determined by our affects and bodily affections, being the result of the extent and quality of our interactions (active or passive), and the kinds of knowledge these give rise to – often of an imaginative sort. Just as there is nothing morally normative about our desire (d_2), so there is nothing intrinsically liberating about desire: the affections that determine our striving in a given way might themselves be sourced in inadequate ideas or sad passive affects, leading some to ‘fight for their servitude as if for salvation’ as in §1.2.3, in the same way that others might fight for democratic rights against a tyranny, and so on.

⁷⁰ A later definition at 3p56dm repeats that of d_4 : ‘desire is the very essence, or nature, of each individual insofar as it is conceived to be determined, by whatever constitution it has, to do something’ – desire is defined as a constitution of affects and ideas that produces a specific dispositional awareness.

§2.5 Three Problems for Desire

I have gone to additional lengths to reconstruct Spinoza's doctrine of human desire, because I consider its general account in the critical literature to be insufficiently detailed, with terms like power, conatus, desire, and freedom too often either conflated or insufficiently distinguished (good exceptions include LeBuffe, 2010, and Viljanen, 2011). But I may have inadvertently made Spinoza's reasoning appear more robust than it actually is. Having shied away from a number of interpretative challenges, it is time to subject this reconstructed desire to a critical gauntlet. Condensed, these are the criticisms that Spinoza's account of desire is intrinsically teleological; that it cannot overcome *akrasia* except through a rarefied cognitive therapy that excludes most individuals; and that the primary affect of desire (d_3) is superfluous, and is better explained as a species of the other two. For it to withstand these tests, I will need to show how Spinoza's account of conatus and desire remains coherent and persuasive in its explanation of the possibility of agency and freedom, as well as how its critics rely on or introduce issues with the textual material that can be resolved or dismissed. (Spinoza's apparent doctrinal egoism is addressed in §2.7, given that it is not a critique of desire per se but a misconception of it). We find these stress tests here rather than earlier in the chapter, because through them I intend to explain desire's necessity for human freedom, drawing on our now-established definitions of conatus, capability and relative freedom.

§2.5.1 Desire is Intrinsically Teleological

Bennett (1984) introduces this problem in a peculiar way: while he reads Spinoza as anti-teleological, and even supplies additional arguments to bolster his anti-teleological polemic in E1app, he claims Spinoza's account of the conatus is implicitly based on teleological assumptions. Bennett uses a push/pull analogy: while the conatus as an efficient cause would involve a pushing motion (striving *as its nature*, as defined earlier), there is in fact a

pull or *telos*, as activities result from doing that which aids or is *for* self-preservation (1984, §50). ‘People always do things that tend to keep them in existence’, and so in Spinoza’s conatus doctrine there is a ‘barely audible *click*’ from ‘If he does it, it helps him’ (efficient cause, e.g. 3p6) to ‘If it would help him, he does it’ (final cause, e.g. 3p9s, *d*₂: §53.4). Hence it is implicitly teleological in that it ‘infers facts about conduct from the facts about the results of the conduct’ (§57.5). Others have remarked on this subtle teleology (Nadler, 2006, 198-9), while the forthright nature of Bennett’s observations has influenced others (Rice, 1985; Curley, 1988, 164, and 1990; Garrett, 1999) to establish defensive arguments for Spinoza’s teleological thinking. Among them Garrett is most articulate, arguing that it is not inconsistent to claim that a singular thing naturally pursues its own self-preservation *with* understanding the given action’s ‘(likely or presumptive) beneficial consequences in order to explain why the singular thing ‘selected’ *that* course of action over the alternatives’ (1999, 316; cf. 2002, 148). In effect, a thing can act conatively and purposively towards that which it judges will aid its self-preservation.

We can quickly agree with Viljanen that the *Ethics* is ‘anti- or non- teleological by design’ (2011, 119), given its geometrical deductive structure and necessitarianism, but this does not remove the problem so easily. One possibility is to separate Spinoza’s criticism of divine teleology in 1app with a human teleology or purposiveness that motivates our actions, as LeBuffe does (2010a, 231), but this is to make human desire a ‘kingdom within a kingdom’ (3pref), subject to its own unique laws, which Spinoza grants as absurd. We could admit the force of Bennett and Garrett’s claims, and concede that Spinoza’s account of conatus has some teleological features but still stands. But this is too imprecise: *if* Spinoza’s account of conatus is teleological, then, modifying 3p6, ‘each thing, insofar as it is in itself, strives for ends that realise its perseverance in being’. But two problems follow from this. If it strives *for*, then this implies that each thing has an intrinsic conative knowledge of what would actually preserve its being, which is false: there are innumerable examples from

human and animal life of beings desiring what immediately or indirectly hinders their actual self-preservation. Second, if a thing is said to strive *for*, then the locus of ethical behaviour is in the ends for which it strives. For ethically-minded creatures, this would require an internal faculty for identifying and steering towards such ends, i.e. the will. It would imply that a cause does not necessarily determine an effect, and that this will has the capability to override the body's affections and impose what it actually strives towards. It not only undermines the basis for ethical change, it also introduces a scheme of causality at odds with Spinoza's own metaphysics. (That is not to say our concept of desire is safe: we still need to demonstrate how this consciousness of striving can incorporate self-directed change).

There is some ambiguity in Bennett and Garrett's critique as to whether this applies to conatus and/or desire – to bolster the clarity of their critique, I will apply this to human desire specifically, given that it concerns the conscious representation of an action's consequences to that agent. (This thereby avoids another absurdity that would otherwise follow, that §1.7's hurtling stone perseveres in being for the sake of its own self-preservation, suggesting a degree of mental self-representation). In this way we can retain the conatus as an efficient cause *and* desire as its human consciousness, which is constituted by an environment of affects, appetites, and imaginative representations of purposes and ends, like those described in 1app, as well as by rational ideas like common notions, which are all networked together. We can avoid the 'kingdom within a kingdom' absurdity by adding that the conatus is efficiently caused *and* so too is desire, given that it is our very essence or power, insofar as it is conceived as determined to do something by a given affection (d_4). While d_4 accounts for appetites and volitions, bodily affections arise out of any interaction between our body and another, from which a localised but universal source of knowledge called 'imagination' arises, as well as the affects of joy and sadness that indicate any increase or decrease in our power as a result of that interaction.

So for our account of desire to remain upright, we must be clear about where conatus ends and desire begins. For human beings, there is no pure experience of conatus available: desire is *our* consciousness of *our* appetites, a supervening layer, while appetites themselves do not include any form of awareness, and rather realise themselves through us. Thus appetites explain the innumerable bodily impulses and motions that animate us each day. This shouldn't mean that we confuse desire with some overly cerebral faculty like the will: rather, it explains to us how our appetites are determined by affects and images from previous interactions that then dispose us towards a given behaviour or attitude. We can illustrate this with an example.

Imagine a person called Lucy. Lucy is a vegan, and begins experiencing stomach cramps that she associates with hunger. Her appetite for a substantive, energy-inducing meal in the early afternoon will result in a desire conditioned by various internal prohibitions on animal-derived foods, affects associated with the pleasure or pain certain memories of flavours evoke, and a store of experience regarding suitable local cafés within walking distance of the university library. Lucy's desire that chooses a lentil broth from Bluebell Kitchen therefore can be explained without need for teleology or final causes – the efficient causes do all the work. Thus in this way Lucy's brother, Chris, being motivated by the same conative impulses to maintain his being but determined by different affects, ideas and limitations, feels his stomach rumble, notices the office clock, and remembering he has a discount coupon for a chicken burger meal, wanders down to the nearby McDonalds where, with the money saved, he chooses to buy a novelty ice-cream flavour, advertised as available for a limited time only.

In either case, there may be a claim that the lunch decisions were entirely spontaneous or unconscious, or that they were in fact willed and freely chosen. We can see now that both claims are incorrect. In this way we can understand why appetite is no pure,

effective machine for survival, but that, using another example, Maria can freely forego nutritious food while Mustafa can freely forego joyous social interactions, one for an affect-image combination of happiness associated with slimness, the other for an affect-memory combination of self-contentment associated with completing a difficult task single-handedly.⁷¹ All persons in these examples desire, and there is no real difference between their desires except the extent to which they emerge from adequate ideas and joyous affects, and the kinds of activity these causally result in. While we can talk about human conatus, our discussion will be meaningless unless it includes the nature of this cognitive/affective steering mechanism called desire with which we strive, and how it differs in its activity/passivity and nature based on the kinds of affects and ideas that constitute it.

But there is still one more unexplained feature of the teleology critique. In 1app, Spinoza explains how the origins of human belief in an anthropocentric universe and other errors regarding divine teleology result from a void between our experience of our actions, and our knowledge of the causes that led to them (cf. §2.3). Yet there is something about this belief in our own free will that arises naturally, and may even be inescapable. In §1.7's wry example of the stone that discovers its free will as it hurtles through the air, Spinoza adds that 'because this prejudice is innate in all men, they are not so easily freed from it'. It is unlikely that even the brightest savant could confidently recognise the causes that give rise to their every desire. But notably, in 3p2s, where Spinoza makes much the same points regarding free will, there is no adjoining claim regarding its innateness. One could conjecture that it does not pertain to the essence of a human mind to believe innately in its own free will, but rather that this belief necessarily arises through our interactions with the natural

⁷¹ One can also note 2p23 alongside 3p9s and 3df8, which explains that the mind knows itself through the body's affections. It should be clear that Spinoza's definition of consciousness is much broader than a modern one, incorporating a wide variety of ideas including affects, memories, beliefs and imaginings, alongside more rational common notions and intuitive knowledge. For more intensive surveys, see Garrett, 2008 and LeBuffe, 2010b.

world. Therefore beliefs in our own free will, or that we act *for* an end, or even that God does, in most cases arise in the minds of all human beings at some point. This is an effect of imagination, that inadequate form of knowledge which necessarily arises out of our regular interactions with other bodies, and which forms one of the conscious bases from which desire emerges. Thus we can experience desires as originating out of free choice or purposiveness, even though this cannot be the case.

So when Chris chooses the ice-cream or Lucy the broth, what is driving their actions? It is the cognitive-affective store acquired from previous interactions that disposes them to act thus. Carriero (2005, 121-5) describes these efficient causes as becoming organised into ‘pattern-like’ systems of motion and matter, compelled by the same conative laws as detailed in Spinoza’s physical digression, be they simple or complex bodies like human beings. Their ‘motive tendencies are not structured about ends’ (2005, 134), but rather strive to actualise dispositions stored in their constitutive parts. We need not base all our account of dispositions on 2p13 and the inertial physics of composite bodies, as Carriero does (2005, 133-4; cf. Viljanen, 2011, 109-12, for problems with this), to explain how they determine our desires. These dispositions result from an environment of affects, memories, imaginings, and reasonable ideas that together form the consciousness, or desire, determining us to a given end. So while desire is *not* teleological, it can still be experienced as *for* an end even where this is inaccurate.⁷² This therefore restores some importance to how our imaginings, including those of purposiveness, give actual form to our desires.

§2.5.2 It Does Not Explain the Problem of Akrasia

Spinoza is fond of Ovid’s dictum ‘I see the better, yet I do the worse’: it appears at 3p2, 4pref, 4p17s, and Ep 58, and suggested some riddle that his ethical philosophy needed to account

⁷² This is akin to LeBuffe’s ‘Immediacy Interpretation’, which claims that while the imagination is not intrinsically erroneous itself, by nature it will be causally led into some error (his example, not tuned to teleology, is the sun’s distance as it appears to us – see 2010a, 79).

for. The phrase encapsulates the problem of *akrasia*, whereby one acts in a way contrary to one's better judgement. By *better judgement* I refer to a moral or intellectual evaluation of a given situation, which an agent then disregards in the course of their action. It is an old philosophical problem, and up to Spinoza's time was still presented in terms of wayward bodily passions that needed mastering by the soul's reason and will.⁷³ Given that he disregards free will as an operative faculty, the challenge for Spinoza is to present an alternative that incorporates his strict determinism and his account of desire. *Akrasia* is a political problem for populations compelled to passivity and servitude out of a vacillation or weakness of power, and it remains a profound problem for any ethical philosophy. If the individual mind's moral or intellectual evaluations can remain intact but are unable to influence actual behaviour, then what worth do they have? Fortitude, generosity and courage are all well and good as active affects (3p59s), but Spinoza needs to demonstrate how, like Macbeth, we might screw our courage to the sticking-place.

The problem of *akrasia* has been explicitly directed to Spinoza in several recent studies, and is generally levelled as a dilemma to work through *with* Spinoza, rather than an obstacle that might derail his ethics. I will first present how it has been posed, and then give an argument of my own why it jeopardises his account (the *exclusive adequacy restriction*). This will result in a more rigorously defined conception of how the affects form and determine what we desire, and their role in the *re-programming* of desires.

Lin (2006) argues that the conflict of reason and the passions is central to Spinoza's account of the good life. It indicates how reason is limited in power and, in its conflict with the passions, displays the relative strength of both. Lin focuses on a number of passages in Part 4 where Spinoza contrasts the power of a future good with a present one (e.g. 4p10,

⁷³ Plato's *Phaedrus* famously depicts the human soul as like a chariot piloted by reason, but pulled in wayward directions by honourable spiritedness and the ignoble passions, and remains a classic allegory for the necessity of subduing the passions. In her argument for a Spinozan freedom as life without the passions, James (2009a, 223) draws on this model. See Kisner, 2011, 6 for a critical view.

4p15-p16), observing that even a true knowledge of good and evil cannot sufficiently overcome a joyous passive affect attached to the present (2006, 395-7).⁷⁴ But while rigorous in his epistemology, Lin is unable to explain why anything other than the ‘causal power’ or intensity of present affects makes them more powerful than future-oriented evaluations (2006, 403-4), which seems tautological (the ‘power makes things more powerful’ fallacy, identified earlier in §2.3.1). *Why* do they have more causal power? Marshall (2008) approaches the same problem, accounting for akrasia instead through a chasm between affects and rational judgements, whereby affects are a kind of ‘motivating belief’ that disposes an agent to act in a given way according to the strength of those affects (2008, 47-9). But his conclusion at best restates the problem facing Spinoza: if actions are determined by affects of varying strengths, without even a need for rational judgements supervening on top of them, then ‘the strongest affect is irrational and runs contrary to our knowledge of the good’ (2008, 52). Lin and Marshall need to interrogate Spinoza more fiercely on this issue: how exactly can we overcome one strong sad passive affect (e.g. fear) with another (e.g. hope), if its basis for credibility is lacking in the present?

LeBuffe (2010a) directs attention more closely to the particular influence of the affects over our actions. The problem of akrasia only appears when we assume that our desires naturally strive for what will actually aid our self-preservation. He gives the example of two nutritionists, charged with the difficult task of reducing a child’s consumption of sweets. The ‘naïve nutritionist’ follows an erroneous assumption like *desire = self-preservation* (I simplify), and so asserts that children naturally desire extra helpings of sprouts and greens, but simply err in their preference for ice-cream (Kisner, 2011, 93 unwittingly commits this fallacy, stating we necessarily desire what increases our power). The ‘optimistic nutritionist’ (Spinoza, in his model) recognises that children desire the taste

⁷⁴ I use Spinoza’s definitions of *good* as that which is useful to preserving our being, and *bad* as that which is harmful to it, with neither having morally normative content (4df1-df2, 4p8). Cf. note 67.

of sweet things, and so guides them towards healthier variants like oranges and pecans (2010a, 113-6). In the first case, extrapolating a little for our purposes, the naïve nutritionist simply enforces a new and what she/he considers more rational activity over the child (for the child has not itself determined that this activity is reasonable and will make them feel better), under the expectation that it will soon thrive in this new ‘correct’ behaviour; in the latter case, the optimistic nutritionist changes not the action but the affects and associations around it. Oranges and pecans may produce similar states of *titillatio* and *laetitia*, once guided and incentivised (though LeBuffe may be optimistic here). The problem of akrasia is therefore an affective one, and a re-programming of the affects and how they determine desires is called for.

This is certainly a compelling case, but like the earlier teleological claims, would sin against the spirit of what Spinoza sets out to accomplish in Parts 4 and 5 of *Ethics*, which is to explain how the mind’s acquisition of adequate knowledge enables it to become as much a cause of its own affects and activity as possible. *If* the kind of akratic results that compromise noble desires are caused by strong passive affects, then Spinoza’s ethics can only assist us to the extent that we re-tune our affective mechanisms. This approach is precisely that of the ‘psychotherapy’ reading identified earlier (see note 55 above), one which charges 5p10s with the ethical breakthrough for the egoistic individual mind’s inner repose. But this is then to disregard all the other doctrines regarding the free man, adequate ideas, common notions, and the mind’s eternity through the intellectual love of God (‘rubbish which causes others to write rubbish’ as Bennett has it, 1984, §85.3), which cause no fewer problems for their interpretations.

The problem of this affect-driven approach is mirrored in Deleuze, who insists that pursuing joyous passive affects will always lead to our empowerment. Whereas sad passions indicate ‘when we are most alienated’ and weak, the *Ethics* is ‘necessarily an ethics of joy:

only joy is worthwhile, joy remains, bringing us near to action' (1988, 28). Again, this is a compelling reading, but still relies on an uncritical assumption that what our desire associates with joy will aid our self-preservation. To confirm the absurdity of this claim, we can imagine a third figure with our sprout-avoiding child, the Deleuzian nutritionist. Given that the child desires sweets and eating these causes joy, there is no reason not to prevent the child continuing to eat sweets whenever they want. The child should take their joy as a normative instruction to eat sweets wherever possible, and to pursue that possibility with all their desire. If they become sick, or unhealthy, or too restless to sleep, then that is an unfortunate but necessary consequence of evading the 'mystifications of the tyrant' (ibid.; see also Deleuze, 1990, 269-71). But this seems to merely replace one tyranny with another, one of compulsive and meaningless joy, when more often some sad passions are necessary to understanding our actual situation, or recognising the limits of our own capability (from which we might then strive to become more able, or seek others of a common nature who may be also experiencing the same affects).⁷⁵ One might counter that the nutritionist could then limit the availability of sweets, but this is neither in Deleuze's schema nor does it allow any agency to the child. Thus both *desire = self-preservation* and *joy = self-preservation* are false.

There may be a solution: *akrasia* refers to the weakness of our better judgements to counter the affects that also determine our behaviour, implicitly supposing an opposition between them. We must explain with greater precision the composition of an individual's desire, and assess how the affects and cognitions that constitute its consciousness interact. From *Ethics* Part 4 we can derive two insights to shape the discussion: *a*) affects are

⁷⁵ Another solution to this problem is offered by my friend, a child nutritionist-cum-chef, who helps toddlers overcome their aversions to fruit and vegetables through interactive hands-on classes, focused on making the textures of foods and constructing basic meals a fun activity in itself, involving an imaginatively-rich story. This instrumental approach to human desire, combining cognitive and affective guides, is outlined in §2.6.

necessary elements of human life, with a dynamic internal relation to each other that in turn disposes our desires, but *b*) the mind's adequate ideas themselves produce joyous affects which can overcome even strong sad affects. I will then claim that there is a leap too quickly from *a*) to *b*) that creates the *exclusive adequacy restriction*.

a) As beings in nature we are necessarily limited by external forces (4a1, 4p2-p4), and are determined to interactions that will modify our bodies and produce ideas of these as affects. Affects are relative in power to each other, with present-orientated affects more powerful than future-orientated ones, given that the causes for determining these future effects are less clear to us, and so are perceived inadequately (4p9-p12, 4p16-17). Yet one affect can only be diminished or replaced by another stronger affect (4p7), and even desires arising from a true knowledge of good and evil can be overwhelmed by stronger affects that compel us to error (4p15), as we saw earlier. Yet a desire that arises from joy is stronger than one arising from sadness (4p18s), given that it includes an image of something that increases the mind's power (3p21), even if it is based on inadequate ideas. By this token, the solution to akrasia seems to lie with an affective therapy, and falls into all the problems with this reading detailed above.

b) 4p8 infers that ideas of what concerns our good (defined in 4df1 as what is useful to us) involve an affect of joy. 4p14 claims that no affect can be diminished by the cognition of a truth of our own good in itself, but only diminished by the extent to which that cognition has a corresponding affect (thus akrasia). Albeit weak, we can follow a track through 4p20dm ('Virtue is human power itself') to 4p23, which states that one does not 'act from virtue insofar as one is determined to do something by inadequate ideas, but only insofar as one is determined by one's understanding', doing something from one's essence alone (we should also add the caveat *as much as possible...* before 'from', so that this remains possible for human beings). Thus 4p24: 'Acting absolutely from virtue is nothing else in us but acting,

living and preserving our being (these three signify the same thing) by the guidance of reason, from the foundation of seeking one's own advantage'. From this, Spinoza deduces that reason guides our striving to further understanding, by which the mind increases its store of adequate ideas which in turn determine desires that directly correlate to its actual self-preservation. This knowledge is of a universal kind, found in common notions, being 'the knowledge of God' (4p28; cf. 4p26-27). Thus with sufficient understanding, we can be determined to act by reason alone (4p59) rather than by our passions, given that these involve acting from our own nature alone and will thus involve our greatest empowerment.

Spinoza's reasoning is more opaque here, and there are some general structural issues in the latter half of Part 4 which might explain 4p59's late and unexpected enthusiasm for reason's power to override all other passions, something seemingly disproved by 4p15 in *a*).⁷⁶ Spinoza needs an argument for the greater power of adequate ideas in determining behaviour over passive affects, otherwise his case in Part 5 for the freedom and *beatitudo* of the mind through the third kind of knowledge will collapse. But there is a risk in taking too great a leap from *a*) to *b*), which Spinoza himself makes by 4p59 and returns to in the second half of Part 5, and which some readers understandably follow. The risk I refer to is what I term the *exclusive adequacy restriction*, whereby the freedom or virtue of human beings is said to rely solely (well, as presented in the literature, very heavily) on the acquisition of adequate ideas. The only freedom worth having, in this restriction, is that of the 'free man', Spinoza's model of a theoretical individual who lives solely by the dictates of reason. Postponing interpretative issues about that for §3.2.1, Spinoza's entire philosophical project is to attain the total perfection of the individual human mind, it states. 'All things are as

⁷⁶ It does not follow at all from previous propositions. While 4p1-p40 broadly maintain a focused study of desire and the affects in terms of reason and power, Spinoza inexplicably returns to defining the affects again in 4p41-p58, a laborious task already completed by 3agd, and then bounces to reason itself (4p59-p66). The free man material at the close (4p67-73) is also unexpected – its use will be assessed in §3.2.1.

difficult as they are rare' (5p42s) would be the motto of this reading, whereby true human freedom is at best available to an exclusive circle of very intelligent individuals, leaving the rest of humankind to sit back and enjoy the widescreen shadow-play in the Cave of superstition and servitude.

A more quotidian way of illustrating this problem is with a children's musical talent contest: the *exclusive adequacy* Spinozists will claim that the only good of the competition is to win outright, and that nothing else is valid. Parents should therefore coach their children to seek only first place, to assume a right to it even, and to feel bitterly disappointed with even a silver medal. The quality and variety of the other acts are of no consequence. The *relative adequacy* argument I make is that increasing our freedom or power to any degree is our greatest good. In this case, performing music to a good enough standard that it joyously affects oneself and others is itself the good of the competition – indeed, the competition may not even be conducive to this good. Thinking back to our nutritionists, it will be agreed that a mixture of affective motivations is needed to progress a musical skill (fear of humiliation, or hope for first prize are all powerful but not strictly necessary motivators), determining the child to practice more and so increase their chances of success, and in §3.3 I introduce some political consequences of imaginative motivators. For now, we can remark that even this is too restrictive: whereas only musically-inclined individuals (or their ambitious parents) enter the competition, every human being has a conative interest in increasing their own capability and experiencing the joy this produces, and so becoming freer is relevant to everyone.

Of course there are good reasons for supporting the exclusive adequacy reading: Spinoza's repeated dismissals of the *vulgus*, discussed in §1.5, and the uncompromising rigour of Part 5's account of how the greatest part of the mind is eternal, and its highest

good is in the intellectual love of God (5p23, 5p25).⁷⁷ We can resolve in passing this apparent difference between Spinoza's overall objective of liberating human individuals, and its stringent cognitive programme in Part 5 by identifying that these are the conditions for the mind to become an adequate cause of its own activity, that is to say, acting from its own nature alone. It is not that Spinoza prizes one kind of absolute freedom over all others, rather, his ethical and political works share the same objective of enabling people to become freer, in different ways, and with different degrees of power. Thus to advance straight to *b*) is to leave behind all the fundamental remarks about utilising common notions, the imagination and joyous passive affects which compose reality as perceived by most of us, most of the time – elements which can aid our freedom, outlined in §2.6.

One implication of the exclusive adequacy restriction appears in Youpa, who claims that rational judgements can be causally 'efficacious' in motivating our behaviour (2007, 382). This wades back into the akrasia problem: relying on 4p19 ('From the laws of one's own nature, everyone necessarily wants, or is repelled by, what he judges to be good or evil'), Youpa claims that a rational judgement of a given good will be sufficient to determine us to act in a way disposed to realising it, using this claim to explain 4p59 (2007, 383). Youpa then adds that there are two sources of motivation: the rational (and, we can say, exclusively adequate) reasonable cognition of a good; and a more basic, 'unenlightened' motivation founded on appetites from 3p9s (*d*₂). There is no need to rely on Ockham's razor, a critique of its implied elitism (as Steinberg, 2016, 78 does), or a simple restatement of the problem of akrasia, to dismiss this point. From what has now been established in this sub-section, the means for increasing our capabilities and becoming relatively freer is through our desires,

⁷⁷ Many readers take Spinoza to endorse overcoming the passions as much as possible. I argue that even very reasonable persons cannot avoid experiencing passive affects and inadequate ideas: – adequately determining the cause of every affection would be impossible. Spinoza instead seeks to identify which inadequate ideas leads to effects non-conducive to the preservation of our being, or in Spinozan terms, which are not reasonable. Traditional readers include Bidney, 1940, 300, Smith, 2003, 48-53, James, 2009a, 223, Lin, 2009, 282; DeBrabander, 2007, 25-8 is more nuanced.

understanding what images, affects and reasonable ideas constitute the environment out of which they arise. Thus we can agree with Steinberg's 'Constitution Thesis' (2016, 79) that the kinds of rational evaluations tracked by Youpa are instead constituted by desires. Expanding this claim further, we can observe a limited form of agency, through the understanding of these inadequate ideas and their causes, by which to redirect and overcome their influence with other stronger affects.

While we must be careful to avoid the impression of there being any faculty of desire (there are only specific *desirings*), each desire is composed of a mixture of affects and ideas. These ideas will necessarily include those of the imagination (e.g. memory, purposiveness, images that might evoke pleasure or fear), because as individuals in nature we cannot but interact with external forces. But they might also include those that involve reason, such as common notions, which taken together can guide our desires in a more reasonable way, that is to say, following our criterion of power-freedom in §1.7 and its equivalence to reason, is a way conducive to our actual self-preservation. It is not that these ideas are only as powerful as the affects they are bundled with – we should now recognise ideas as themselves involving affects, thus, ideas that arise from the understanding are necessarily joyous, given that they involve an increase in our power of acting. In this way, Spinoza's desire can explain and overcome the problem of akrasia thus: so long as a mind is composed of a greater number of adequate ideas and joyous affects,⁷⁸ its experience of its own 'better judgement' will correspond with the motivational dispositions that lead it to act. Nor are we making desire a 'kingdom within a kingdom': its greater composition of adequate ideas and joyous affects is of the same order as an individual body's maintenance of a certain ratio of motion

⁷⁸ This thereby correlates with 5p20s, which states that a mind 'acts most' where 'adequate ideas constitute the greatest part'. This strikes me as consistent with this chapter's running argument that freedom is something relative and that one can become freer.

and rest in its parts (2p13): in both cases, an individual's power results from harmonious internal self-direction.

§2.5.3 As an Affect, it is Superfluous

It was noted back in d_3 that Spinoza's introduction of desire as a primary affect alongside joy and sadness is a little unexpected, given that it does not correlate to any increase or decrease in an individual's power, unlike the other two. What distinguishes desire as a passive affect, if anything? A number of attentive readers have recently called into question desire's role here, and the force of their challenges may also unseat our concept. Bennett (1984, §60) asks how desire can be anything other than a 'species of pleasure', if following 3p9s it describes an 'upthrust' from appetite to an experience of joy to which the desire was directed. Taking Spinoza to be a closet teleologist, Bennett reorders his affective schema so that the affects that arise from desire are reduced to eight (1984, §61.2), broadly correlating to experiences of our appetites (e.g. greed, lust). Yet a consequence of Bennett's own critique would be removing desire as a passive affect altogether, and it is not clear why he even retains it.

LeBuffe is more sympathetic to Spinoza: why would he use three passive affects if two function (2009, 207)? The answer lies in the nature of desire itself: unlike conative power, it does not diminish, but remains constant even as our conative power or affects change. He gives the example of fleeing a large dog: a sad passive affect of fright corresponds to a decrease in one's power, though one's conscious desire to free oneself from this cause of sadness remains constant, as one scrambles away (2009, 208-9). There is something distinct enough about desire as a passive affect, but LeBuffe supplies no further detail on its nature other than it being an affective 'kind of consciousness' that 'depends upon the type of joy or sadness that gives rise to it' (2009, 210). This is hardly clearer than Bennett's earlier treatment, still leaving desire structurally superfluous. Marshall has more recently

accidentally done away with the concept in his attempt to make it more structurally sound, claiming 'all affects of desires are also affects of either joy or sadness' (2014, 168). Again, it does not explain why Spinoza needed to introduce a third primary affect of desire, nor its specific deployments in the text to explain a range of affects inexplicable without an element of awareness of our own desires, for instance longing, gluttony, lust or anger (see 3p56s, 3ad32-48).

This problem would seem solvable according to our earlier definition: following the discussion in d_4 we recognise desire as consciousness, supplying the mind with information about its own striving power, albeit of a limited, often imaginative and affective kind. But is desire merely composed of affects? By Spinoza's own schema, it also seems to determine a wide subset of affects, not associated with joy or sadness (e.g. benevolence 3p27s, greed and ambition 3p56s). This is at the heart of the ambiguity in Bennett, LeBuffe and Marshall's accounts: the extent to which desire, as consciousness of our conatus, motivates affects of joy and sadness (as well as the extent to which these affects motivate our desire, as Marshall and LeBuffe observe). Steinberg offers a concise way of understanding this dual relationship: joy and sadness are 'explanatorily dependent on striving', while desire is an 'orientation' describing how an affect in turn 'modifies one's striving' (2016, 74-5). This flips over Marshall's proposal: rather than desires being a kind of sub-species of joy or sadness, now Steinberg proposes that all affects have a 'conative side' (ibid.), which is desire.

Steinberg is correct to re-prioritise desire in the affective schema – and leads us back to a more concise definition, that the passive affect desire arises from one's mental experience of one's own appetites (or, we could say, one's *consciousness* of one's appetites, in the modern sense of that word). Given that an affect is a mental idea arising from an affection of the body, we can observe without problem that some passive affects arise solely from the experience or consequences of pursuing our appetites: thus desire is an affect, and

neither of joy nor sadness. In this way we might explain the famous stimulus-response experiments by Pavlov: on hearing a bell it associates with food, the dog is passively affected both by joy at the imagining of its power of acting increased with a rich dinner, *and* a desire to eat that dinner which it did not experience up until that moment. The dog may have eaten one hour ago: the desire does not correspond to the natural motions of appetite (though now produces one), nor is it solely a joy in the idea of eating.

It seems that our concept of desire has emerged out of these three stress tests somewhat intact, though it is unlikely that Spinoza's concept of desire would have remained coherent without this reconstructive work. It has involved some reassembly to explain why human purposiveness is causally inevitable but not teleological, while Spinoza's solution to *akrasia* appeared straightforward, until a thorough assessment of the affective-cognitive basis of our desires nearly had it unstuck. The exclusive adequacy restriction issued a warning not to invest all our ethical energies on acquiring adequate ideas for their own sake – rather, we must recognise that such ideas *are* affective, and include affects of joy insofar as they increase our power of acting.⁷⁹

Yet there is much about desire as a passive affect that makes it indistinct from the affects of joy or sadness, and on the face of it, seems redundant. With a little reconstruction, it can be recognised as an experience of one's own desire, but this still left questions about the overarching relation of affects and ideas (or ratio of motion and rest, as discussed in §2.3) in the individual overall. Our given examples of lunching siblings, ineffective nutritionists and dog-fleeing philosophers all supposed that affects and the imagination are at the foundation of desire, and thus the foundation of ethical life. There is a remarkable implication to this concerning the individual's freedom as a necessarily social and political

⁷⁹ Thus the philosopher who claims "ignorance is bliss" – e.g. Ecclesiastes 1:18 – cannot possibly understand the meaning of their idea, for knowledge always involves an increase in our power of acting, with a corresponding joy. Hence Spinoza's *Ethics* signs off with an endorsement of understanding for its own sake: greater adequate understanding, greater happiness.

endeavour, which will now be addressed, as we present in more concise form a general statement of desire, before presenting five original derivations about its nature that will help establish the claims of the thesis in the ensuing three chapters.

§2.6 Desire and Power

In this penultimate section I will present a concise statement about the power of desire, drawing on the claims from the previous sections. Then in a series of sub-sections I will outline five further original claims derived from this account but not essential to its cohesiveness. I will introduce these claims with a remark about 4p24, alighted briefly upon in §2.5.2 b), which makes a condensed but illuminating claim for the correlation of desire, power and reason. For Spinoza, '[a]cting absolutely from virtue is nothing else in us but acting, living and preserving our being (these three signify the same thing) by the guidance of reason, from the foundation of seeking one's own advantage'. We can disassemble this to present what we now understand about the power of desire.

To *act absolutely from virtue* is to act from our own power or capability alone, adequately, without other affective-cognitive determinants making us merely a partial or passive cause of our activity (4p8, 4p20). This form of activity is *acting, living and preserving our being by the guidance of reason*, which is one guided towards an understanding of the causes of effects that involve us. These causes belong to a commonly-conceived order of nature with mathematics-like laws (cf. 1app, 2p40s2, 2p47s; also §2.2), and are thus intelligible though not readily available to all human minds. Our *acting, living and preserving our being* is the same thing because as composite individuals, our only metaphysical realness is in the power which we express, one that is necessarily active, alive, and conatively self-preserving (following §2.3), until it is finally overwhelmed by external causes. All this arises from the *foundation of seeking one's own advantage* in that we, in essence, strive to

persevere in being, and are thus determined by what our desires dispose us to pursue as our own advantage (§2.4).

The problem lies in how our desires can tend not towards our actual advantage, but some behaviour which, under the sway of affects or inadequate knowledge, we have come to associate with our good. The ethical imperative for becoming freer is to reorganise what constitutes our desire so that it correlates to our actual self-perseverance. Spinoza's final claim, relating back to the first part, is that what enables us to act as an adequate cause of our behaviour is our understanding. This is bound by common notions and natural laws of which we cannot become aware of except through our interactions and reliance on others through joyous encounters, be they with parents, friends, teachers, authors, musicians, or whatever. One can thereby recognise problems with the assumption that Spinoza's philosophy is one of egoism, but the force of this criticism is reserved for the next section.

We can state this in even more general terms, so that its significance is transparent, giving us a workable doctrine of desire to guide further discussions. Each human individual is a transient realisation of the universe's power, which determines it to act in ways that persevere its existence and maintain an internal harmony of motion and rest (by §2.3). We are essentially compelled to act in ways that maintain our health and happiness. But this compulsion is also necessarily mediated by our body's affections and our mind's ideas of these, an interconnected network (or machine)⁸⁰ of affects of joy and sadness, imaginings of

⁸⁰ Following Deleuze and Guattari (2013a, 39-46), the model of desire as a kind of machine is the closest analogy to its actual functions I have found in the critical literature, though is only approximate to my concept of a network or environment of ideas. Like their 'machine', it is not defined by subjectivity or lack, but is a productive and dynamic flow of energy, a force of reality that produces itself, and is one with its object. Unlike their desiring-machines, it is not privy to some sub-noumenal realm of actual self-preservation, and its network-dispositions may determine it towards interactions that cause sadness or vacillation. But the 'machine' seems more effective than other analogies of drivers/cars, riders/horses etc. which all suppose the Platonic model of reason mastering the passions which Spinoza dispenses with (cf. notes 73 and 77 above).

memory, opinion and uncritically-accepted belief, as well as some common notions and other rational ideas about how best to realise our needs (d_1 - d_4 , §2.5.2; cf. 5p20s).

This consciousness is produced by the body's affections as it interacts with others, from which ideas and affects arise. We become more capable when these affections/affects are determined by ourselves as a cause as much as possible, be they in ourselves or in others. We are a greater cause of these through our understanding, as we observe common notions in effects and their causes, from which we can derive rules that guide our internal dispositions. This rationality involves an increase in our power of acting and will therefore be joyous, and capable of overcoming a strong sad passive affect (or else there is still some residual element of the inadequate belief that influences our desire, causing vacillation). Thus the value of reason to our lives is not merely epistemic: if we truly hold reasonable ideas then they will guide our affects and desires, and we will experience them with joyous affects. Reason's good is in the service of human empowerment, and thus when Spinoza describes living according to reason in the later political works, he refers to this ontological meaning of reason *as* empowerment, outlined later in Chapters 3 and 4.

To become more capable then, we must acquire more rational ideas (or *potestas*, after §2.3.2) with which to guide our desires, as otherwise nature disposes us to servitude to harmful ideas as mapped out in §1.2, from which erroneous beliefs like free will and divine purpose arise, and by which other powerful social forces will mercilessly exploit us. This journey to acquiring more understanding is long and difficult, and its first steps begin in the imagination and passive affects which inform our everyday beliefs. Thinking of the nutritionists, the success of the optimistic nutritionist lies in recognising that affects influence our desires but these affects do not intrinsically tend to self-preservation. The child likes sweet things: rather than prescribing sprouts or allowing free run in the sweet shop, the optimistic nutritionist re-wires connections, substituting high-sugar sweets with

healthier alternatives. With some positive motivation and negative enforcers, the child will associate the new image-desire with its desire for sweet-tasting things. This is to accept, as LeBuffe rightly observes, that desires are never intrinsically 'veridical' (2010a, 128), but can be re-programmed to correlate a given desire with knowledge of what actually aids our being. Yet to avoid the problems of benign dictatorship and paternalism, or the weaknesses of the psychotherapy reading, even this work of rewiring the affects is not alone sufficient: the child must be enabled to recognise why this would be in their own interest and why to freely pursue it, so that they are more of an adequate cause of their own activity, and to that extent freer.

To give another example, one who is passively coerced into sitting in classes of Early Modern Philosophy 101 without any interest in the subject is unlikely to retain much of Descartes: there must be an internally-directed motivation established for acquiring more understanding, and the way that this internal direction emerges is through the affects. Joy is instrumental, being more powerful than sadness given that it involves an image of ourselves becoming more capable, but Spinoza will reserve just as much influence for fear of greater evils, particularly in his political works. Whether this is motivated by a virtuously Socratic love of the truth unadorned, parental cash-rewards for good grades, or a deep-seated fear of failure, is unimportant. Whatever increases our power of acting we will call a good (d_2), and over time the internal composition of our motivational beliefs will change. Goods that actually increase our power of acting are more reliable, as through these our interactions are more likely to be adequately caused, and result in joyous affections which reinforce them. Thus with our example, the student's assignments become easier, parents and teachers no longer berate their laziness, the student feels pride and self-esteem when they recognise their new ability to dissect the ontological argument, all joys associated with (though not necessarily accurately indicative of) an increase in power. *By any affect*

necessary, one might deduce, but joy, being more powerful, is the vehicle to freedom. What drives it is the understanding.

§2.6.1. Educating Joy

Joy should not be confused for what indicates self-preservation: the Deleuzian nutritionist indicated that ideas associated with a given passive affect of joy may be inadequate, and one may experience pleasure in something which directly or indirectly harms one's self-preservation, or itself veils one's servitude (like the 'enlistment' of §1.6.2). What is required instead is an *education of joy*, my first claim. We desire what we associate with our joy, and are determined to pursue it. Any attempt at becoming freer must begin with what is already enjoyed, drawing strength from this powerful affective source, to then begin re-programming the kinds of desires one associates with it. As Steinberg neatly puts it in his argument for the priority of the affects in our moral lives, 'we can only change our minds if we find ways to change our hearts' (2016, 85). Realising what we are capable of, our activity, requires at least some internal direction towards becoming more active and self-determining in the first place, but this needs an affective energy capable of redirecting our current dispositions. In this way there is no more mystery (but no less power) in Pascal's observation that the 'heart has its reasons, which reason does not know' (1969, §277).

The *re-* in re-programming is crucial: the journey to greater understanding is not towards a life free of the passions, but one that is as joyous as possible. 4p45s counsels the importance of pleasure for the philosophical life, be it through green plants, theatre, friends, music or sport, anything that increases the power of our mind and fosters a cheerful disposition and self-contentment (*acquiescentia in se ipso*), which is the highest pleasure available to us (4p42, 4p52s). This joyous life does not attach significance so much to the object associated with joy itself, but one's relation to it – and this separation between the two is necessary for joy's education. Unlike the kinds of mental freedom envisioned as

ataraxia or *nibbana* that involve the mind's separation from emotion and desire, through Spinoza we can develop a model of re-programming desires and joys so that neither are 'overcome' (something only possible through actual death), but are instead maximised and intensified. For there are no affects of the mind insofar as it acts that are not related to desire or joy (3p59), and it will always experience its own activity with a kind of joy, even in spite of negative interactions (this may instead contribute to the agent's resilience and fortitude). Of all desires, desires that arise from reason can 'never be excessive' (4p61) as they are always concerned with our own well-being. But there is something in Spinoza's model that suggests that the acquisition of knowledge and enjoyment of life only engender an even greater desire for these things. In this way we can understand why the 'more capable the mind is of understanding things by the third kind of knowledge, the more it desires to understand things by this same kind of knowledge' (5p26). We should not seek to overcome or master our desires, but to enjoy them as much as possible, in the most lasting ways.

LeBuffe describes this as a 'projectivist' strategy (2010a, 154-9), one that aims to adjust the projected conjunction between 'things that are called good' (or signifier) and what 'calling the thing good expresses' (signified). The education of joy consists in experiencing as much joy as is possible while determining which of our joys correlates to our actual self-preservation. Through this our desires and habits become gradually re-programmed, more often arising from associations with more reliable pleasures (or memories of what apparent joys are actual sources of pain), and in this our relative adequate activity emerges. Thus power is not realised in what the desire *is*, but what the desire *does*, and is always a relational quality. In this way we remain within Spinoza's amoral ethical schema – the good is what is useful to us, which can be relative (but, leaving space for the claims of Chapter 3, there are some goods that are naturally good for most of us which only a well-organised society can realise).

There are several advantages to my claim: nothing in it offends common sense (for who does not wish to experience more joy?), and it explains ethical agency as a process of re-programming the connections between the affects and cognitions that constitute our desires, with the aid of the understanding. One consequence is that while there is no lasting good per se in our sad affects, they are useful to the extent that they enable us to steer our desires and ideas in ways that better realise our well-being. When affected by melancholy produced by the surging popularity of a racist demagogue, one's despairing belief in the inherent folly of one's fellow citizens may offer temporary consolation, suspending one's belief in a common nature with them, but gives no adequate basis from which we can live more capably together. Instead one should understand the indispensable role of the imagination, affects and passivity to ethical life. As Kisner (2011, 169-74) rightly argues, as beings in nature we cannot but be affected by passions and forms of inadequate knowledge, and passive joys thus have a limited role in empowering us. Gatens and Lloyd similarly argue for the necessity of recognising and utilising the imagination for the liberation of collective groups (1999, 37-40; see also Gatens, 2009a, 200, 2009b, 2012, and James, 2009b, 225, 2010, explored in §3.3). Likewise, Steinberg (2009, 49) and LeBuffe (2010b, 536) also provide more sympathetic accounts of how the passive affects and the imagination can enable as many people as possible to live freer and more capable lives, without needing to meet the exacting requirements of the free man.

§2.6.2. Freely Accepting Necessity

A second claim follows logically on, and bears within it another political implication: *we act more capably when we freely obey what is necessary*. Though a little more abstract, it can be illustrated with an example. I drive Rosie to the station to catch her train to the airport, but there is a local event on which we are unaware of, and the car-park is full. I park in an unfamiliar side-street and then help Rosie board with her bags. I return to discover a parking

ticket on the windscreen, and spot a traffic warden in the distance. Now, one reaction would have me curse down the street, or chase after the warden to protest the injustice of my case. Another has me accept the ticket, but with the irrational conclusion that all traffic wardens are evil, or that I am being singled-out for bad luck today by a cruel deity, or that Rosie's laziness is to blame for all this. A third has me recognise the local warning notices, that we should have given more time to get there, the causally inevitable but unfortunate coincidence of the event and Rosie's train, and the benefit of parking restrictions in reducing traffic and road accidents in urban areas. It is possible that in the same situation I might shift from the first to last reactions, as different affects and cognitions influence my vacillation.

Spinoza argues for the importance of accepting and resigning oneself to what is necessary in 4app32, as otherwise our servitude consists in our unreasonable attachment to images and desires of transient or unattainable goods (cf. §1.2), resulting in sad affects that expose us to superstition. Yet a consequence of my second claim is to render Spinoza's somewhat traditional defence of philosophical resignation with more robustness: by recognising the actual causes of a given situation and establishing rules or patterns of behaviour to avoid the causal recurrence of a disempowering effect, I thereby reduce, maintain or possibly even increase my power of acting as a response to a given situation where I am initially disempowered. Wherever I freely obey what is causally necessary, that is, responding in a way determined by ideas arising from my own nature as much as possible, I am more capable than one who rages or despairs against the lot of fate; and even if there was no way I might have anticipated the given event, I am consequently more capable of avoiding it in future through adapting my behaviour. In §3.4 we will explore how the Hebrew people's *free obedience* of natural laws (a seemingly oxymoronic phrase but, by this second claim, not so) enabled them to increase their capability collectively.

§2.6.3. The Good of Willful Desire

My third claim follows from the second, though may at first seem inconsistent with the first: while there is nothing normatively veridical about our desires, *there are instances where one should not abandon one's desires because of contrary social forces*. To a modern reader this may seem obvious, but there is no immediate squaring of this with the textual material. Despite its defences of freedom of speech, Spinoza's model of human empowerment contains a structural predilection for conformity which causes any number of problems for the liberal reader (explored in Chapter 3, including the intriguing claim of Garber, 2008 that by Spinoza's own anti-rebellious premises in TTP, he should not have published his philosophy). This therefore requires an argument for individual self-determination appended to the general case for freedom: there may be instances where the self-determining individual acting as freely as they can from their own nature becomes subject to attack by hostile social forces, and should nonetheless assert their desire.⁸¹

This point is raised here for two reasons: while much of §2.4 presented desire as a form of consciousness, we must not forget that it is the *conatus* as experienced by human beings. Like any thing's *conatus*, it is powerful to the extent that it is composed of a greater proportion of parts that possess an internal harmony or order, and which produce a common effect as much from its own nature as possible. Thus there are instances where the constitution of one's desire is relatively adequate or harmonious, but one may be surrounded by contrary social agents who are themselves possessed by sad harmful ideas like fear and hatred. Rather than capitulate to their inadequate ideas that stem from their passive servitude, be they superstitious, racist, homophobic, or whatever, there is an essential good in socially persevering in one's own identity, remaining resilient, and calling

⁸¹ Though used in different ways and for different ends, my concept of self-determination is inspired by Kisner, 2011 18, which argues that freedom is 'becoming as self-determining as possible', and Marshall, 2014 174, who describes servitude as being 'our lack of self-determination *in our actions*'.

out the hypocrisy or danger of their beliefs.⁸² In this way fundamental social changes have been initiated by courageous individuals whose desire for freedom inspired others to become more active and emulate them (see §5.2.5).

§2.6.4. Maximise Desires-Joys

To avoid justifying the intransigence of the bigot, and to provide some kind of model with which to explore the claims of §2.6.1, my fourth claim is to propose a maximising desires-joys test: *can I recognise the cause of the desire? Am I at least a partial cause? Is it likely to increase my capabilities? Is it compelling me towards something that would aid the well-being of another person like me?* If the answer to the preceding questions becomes uncertain, then more information about the cause and nature of the desire is needed. If the answer is negative, then the desire may be harmful to us and is unlikely to result in a lasting joy.⁸³ To challenge the force of the desire if we wish to overcome it, we will need to consider a stronger emotional response, for instance the likely negative consequences of following it, or the more lasting happiness that might result from an alternative course of action. If the answer to each stage is affirmative, then we can pursue it freely, provided we regularly check that the changes it is producing in us have not now rendered the desire harmful to us, for instance by excess.

The advantage of my maximising desires-joys test is that it applies what has now been understood about the composition of affects and cognitions in human desires. It recognises that there is nothing morally or rationally normative about desires, but identifies a means

⁸² This argument is indebted to a concept of 'willful' politics in Sara Ahmed (particularly 2014, ch. 4).

⁸³ But, it is just as possible that the seemingly harmful desire correlates to an increase in capabilities, for instance the gregariousness produced by alcohol could be observed as foundational to identity-formation and joyous interactions for many young adults in the West. Or the desire for chocolate after a difficult day may provide the body with needed sugars and fats, or alleviate the mind's distress, which are goods, but consumed every day in large quantities will result in a decrease in one's power. In both cases, what are considered moral or social evils may not actually correlate with actual social goods, thus explaining the persistence of a given desire amid hypocritical attitudes.

for re-directing these by which ethical agency is restored. It is also somewhat consistent with Spinoza's own ethics, though goes beyond it. It combines elements of E4pref's account of perfection as envisioning a model of human nature by which to compare our own actions. It also draws on 5p20s's final ethical instructions regarding the affects, which prescribes a process of re-ordering and re-connecting a given affect and its cause, thereby acquiring greater self-control. It concedes nothing to teleology, being confined to only what is probable or known to have occurred on other occasions, which is itself strengthened by the understanding.

But it should also be clear that the test is limited: it requires a capability to recognise the causes of our desires and to understand their composition in inadequate ideas. Among these causes, one must also be capable of recognising when one is only a partial cause of (or even passive to) one's own desires, necessitating reflecting on common notions as well as an intuitive knowledge of oneself. It demands a reasonable knowledge of what counts as human capability and what generally aids our self-preservation. Above all, it requires a social element that is profound, which is the ability to joyously interact with others, and the ability to recognise things of a common nature with ourselves. One's ability to maximise one's desires-joys (I place the words together, to strengthen their bond under the education of joy to self-preservation in §2.6.1) therefore requires a good deal of prior capability, through knowledge, friendship, life experience and reflection. This argument does not appear in Spinoza overtly and, as with the other four claims, we have travelled beyond the text in order to adequately determine these powers of desire. But Spinoza makes a challenging case for reason's guidance in maximising our powers by uniting with others of a common nature, forming more complex individuals that are communities which live peacefully and cooperatively, according to reason. I discuss these in §3.2.1, and present a theory for producing commonality in §3.4 and §5.3. Maximising our desires-joys is, like everything else in Spinoza's philosophy of human freedom, a collective endeavour.

§2.6.5 Individual Freedom is a Collective Good

My fifth claim flows into the next chapter, and indeed informs the entire thesis: *individual freedom is only possible in society, and reflects a political, collective good*. Following §2.5.2 a), all individuals are necessarily limited by others, and to the extent that they exist as natural beings (an odd but necessary distinction from their essences), they are limited by other bodies and thus causally dependent on them. We began the chapter with Ravven's claim that no-one emerges a 'tabula rasa', and long before we approach any capability to pursue developing our understanding we are (in most cases) socialised into a particular community, under a particular language, social position, identity, belief system and so forth. There is a political issue that follows from this – which kinds of societies are most conducive to human freedom? – that I will put aside for the next chapter. Instead I wish to explore the affective and cognitive aspects of this problem, rooted in human sociality.

As we emerge in relations of interdependence with others, so the quality of our interactions is ethically important. It is through these that both ourselves and others can experience an increase in power of acting if the encounter is joyous for us. Thus one chief intention of Spinoza's account of religion discussed in the next chapter is the cultivation of 'piety', being the sum of dispositions and behaviours that result in peaceful, cooperative relations among diverse individuals (TTP 14.13; cf. Gatens and Lloyd, 1999, 94; James, 2014, 155). While Spinoza disregards opinion and hearsay as confused cognitions belonging to the first kind of knowledge, the second kind, common notions, necessarily involves social interactions, as it is through experience, observation, reflection and discussion with others that we not only calibrate patterns by our own observation, but patterns that others help us identify.

The very re-programming of desire to more directly correlate with our actual self-perseverance is an undertaking that cannot be completed alone. Even if the agent feels that

they act independently, the knowledge upon which their ideas is based will come from a store of common notions, experiences, images and affects acquired through a rich and diverse series of interactions with others. It is in this way that 4p18s states that ‘nothing is more useful to man than man’, and that any relationship that includes *commonality*, the recognition that both share a common nature, will necessarily empower both individuals twice as much as on their own singly. The ontological grounds for this commonality in 4p18s are unpacked in §3.2.1, and will involve revisiting the 2p13 claims from §2.3.1, but we can note that the active and effective pursuit of our self-perseverance will necessarily be one guided by reason (as we read with 4p24, and in parallel, across §1.6.2), and reason guides us to live cooperatively and peacefully with one another. Those who live according to reason will necessarily agree in nature (4p35), and will desire that others also live according to reason (4p37) and share in the more lasting joys, self-contentment and well-being that this brings.

§2.7 Conclusion

If there is a lasting ethical dictum from our analysis and reconstruction of conatus, power and desire in Spinoza, it is *to be as active as one can*. Yet modern philosophy has had difficulty with the concepts of desire and power. Extensions of freedom (Kant), spirit (Hegel) or will (Schopenhauer, Nietzsche) into some absolute or transcendental reality has the effect on modern readers of mystifying retrospectively what are, in Spinoza, coherent, practical yet distinct doctrines that explain how human beings can become freer. To Schopenhauer’s maxim that ‘almost all our sufferings spring from society’ (1974, 424), we can refer back to Spinoza and our own arguments to explain such sufferings as desires that arise from inadequate ideas. By understanding the affective and cognitive causes of our desires, and how we might begin re-programming these to maximise our joys and improve our well-being, we can reconnect *almost* all our joys as having to do with others. Chapter 1’s less

cheerful findings will caution the reminder that many people live under sad passions and, to the extent they are passively determined by them, could harm us.

It is not that the loss of concepts like free will or rational motivations sinks any ethical system: rather, it demands more work of it. When Hume tells us that reason is 'the slave of the passions' (1958, 2.3.3), we can reply with Spinoza that the freedom of the passions comes through reason. Desire is an 'emergent property' (a term often used in neuroscience to describe mental states, e.g. Gazzaniga, 2012, 107), a consciousness that arises from the complexity of its constituent parts and which it can partly be explained by, but not necessarily reduced to. Like any given thing, its power is measurable by the harmony of its internal constitution of adequate to inadequate ideas, its ratio of motion and rest. In this way, the most lasting joys and rewarding desires will flow from our nature. As Fischer puts it, our freedom is in 'how we walk down that path', not the path itself (2007, 82).

Desires do not often correlate to what causes us joy or aids our self-preservation, given that they arise out of a form of consciousness that is partly constituted by inadequate ideas. Yet as a consciousness that emerges from our bodily conatus, it is the mediated expression of a dynamic self-preserving energy, an energy we share with all other things. These things increase in complexity to the extent that they compose one individual that maintains an internal harmony and produces a common effect. Given that reason necessarily aids our self-preservation, and necessarily guides us to help others achieve it, by cultivating reason in others we will come to comprise an ever more complex, rational and joyous individual. We do not do this for our own egoistic pride, but for the power it affords us in maximising our joyous encounters and increasing our capabilities for understanding common notions and the nature of things.

In this way we can request more proofs from the many commentators on Spinoza's ethics who claim it is 'radically individualistic' (Rice, 1990, 274; also Den Uyl, 1983, 67-8;

DeBrabander, 2007, 4; Della Rocca, 2008, 206) or 'egoistic' (Barbone, 2002, 107; Bennett, 1984, §69.1). From what we have considered in this chapter, and will further examine in the next, anything that aids the self-preservation of an individual is considered to be virtuous and reasonable, but such things cannot be found within the individual alone. Knowledge of the second and third kind is of a universal sort, but there is no possibility of its acquisition whatsoever unless the individual is raised, educated and now lives in a well-organised, peaceful community, surrounded by friends, leisurely pastimes, opportunities for study, and among citizens who share peaceful, cooperative beliefs. Understanding the causes that determine her or him to act, the rational individual discerns that the capabilities and power of their community are foundational to their own freedom.

Just as the single individual's desire as an interdependent, cognitive-affective consciousness can be understood and re-programmed, so too can that of more complex individuals like social groups, something I will introduce in §3.1. In this way problems like an enslaving 'monarchy of master-desire' (Lordon, 2014, 134) that forces a social group into servitude and passivity can be overcome: a stronger affect needs to emerge, one correlating to a more adequate idea than that of the truth of the master-desire for the afflicted agent. The following chapter will introduce a rigorous definition of collectivity to substantiate this final claim. Still unanswered, it will also explore the adequacy problem of §2.5.2, whereby affects and images collectively shared, that is to say, influencing the communal mindset, are addressed and re-programmed with adequate ideas so that communities can live more peacefully, equitably and cooperatively with each other.

Chapter 3. Collectivity

§3.1 Introduction

There is a consistent desire across Spinoza's thought to enable human beings to become freer, and live more peaceful, reasonable and enjoyable lives. But just as he valued the heights of fortitude and adequate knowledge, he was all too aware of human limitations. In Chapter 1 we assessed those limitations using what Abensour (2011) calls the 'voluntary servitude hypothesis', that in any given society the conditions for tyranny and its means of overthrow lie in the fickle, capricious *vulgus* (§1.2). Spinoza's treatment of this problem in the TTP was found to be complex and ambivalent. Many seem to enjoy fighting for their servitude as if for salvation, stemming from a natural vulnerability to harmful ideas that results from a lack of internal capability, driving hapless individuals towards superstition or adulation of the pomp and ceremony of despotic rule, which becomes the basis of their domination. Yet in his identification of three laws of human nature (§1.4), and our claim from it that there is a gradation of power-freedom (§1.7) that explains political servitude, we deduced that there are some means for enabling individuals to recognise how forces exploit them through their passions, and how they can become freer.

This gave Chapter 2 the task of explaining what these means are. Establishing a position early on for relative freedom, it reconstructed the conatus doctrine to build an elementary metaphysics of power, where each thing is a fleeting realisation of the universe's infinite power (or 'God' as Spinoza terms it), determined in a certain and limited way to persevere in its own being (§§2.2-3). Things are individuated by an internal equilibrium of constitutive parts that interrelate and interdepend in producing the same effect: thus, many things can be said to be individuals, sharing in a conative power. I argued that human

freedom consists in our power of activity, in a way that is as internally driven and adequate as is possible, thus harnessing one's *potentia* (or capability) with the *potestas* (or responsibility) of the understanding. I then distinguished a concept of human desire (§2.4), being the sum of varying affects, imaginative and rational ideas that dispose us to act in a certain way. In subjecting it to three stress tests (§2.5), we encountered difficulties around the experience of purposiveness, akrasia, and the overriding force of the affects. This nuanced the account, placing the affects and imagination as primary, noting that neither desire nor joy intrinsically correlate with self-preservation, while recognising the affective role of reason in re-programming what we associate with joy, through which we desire (§2.6).

The egoist reading of Spinoza was challenged at the end, using a claim that Spinoza's account of human freedom can only be achieved collectively (§2.7). The task of this chapter is to substantiate that claim. To this end, it will construct an account of *collectivity* – that is, the process of forming collective groups or *becoming-collective* – premised initially on Spinoza's ontology of power (§3.2), then foraying into Spinoza's account of the Hebrew Republic in the TTP. It will assess Spinoza's claims for how prophecy, imagination, religious belief and 'free' speech serve an instrumental good in establishing freedom on a collective scale (§§3.3-4). It identifies two readings of Spinoza's Hebrew Republic as either liberated or subjugated, and pursues a middle route (§3.5), taking this exemplar as a model for how inadequate ideas can constitute collective groups and thereby achieve an instrumental political reason, as well as reckoning with Spinoza's own pessimism about such a politics. Through this, it presents a theory of collectivity that explains how some collectives can become individuals, sharing a common nature and set of ideas and desires, that such collectives are not normatively free but can become so, and what the roles of the imagination, affects, power and societal institutions have in this process (§3.6), before concluding on the limits of such a politics.

§3.2 What are Collective Individuals?

Much of the analysis in the last chapter concerned the power and desire of individuals, and was of a predominantly ethical character, so a little more constructive work is necessary for our definitions to apply without reservation to politics. This section remains with the *Ethics*, and presents two claims: the freedom of the reasonable individual is only possible in a community, and that any given community to which an individual might belong has an internal and relative degree of power that, in its most organised and coherent form, correlates to that of an actual individual. Both claims may appear perplexing and unverifiable, but will be established without much difficulty using Chapter 2's arguments, from which a testable definition of collectivity is derived.

§3.2.1 *Nothing is More Useful to Man than Man*

In 4p18s, Spinoza makes a somewhat defensive apology for his 'cumbersome geometric method', and offers to concisely outline the 'dictates of reason' before continuing any further. Among these, we will recall from §2.5.2 how joyous passive affects are necessarily more powerful than sad ones, but Spinoza also introduces a new line of argument so profoundly political that Saar can claim, without much controversy, that 'the entire *Tractatus Politicus* is nothing else than a long scholium of this second scholium [of 4p37] in the *Ethics*' (2014, 16).⁸⁴ It stems from the claim that 'nothing is more useful to man than man', and results in what I will distinguish as a weak (*self-interest*) and a strong (*collectivist*) argument for communal participation.

The *self-interest argument* is of a naturalistic sort, that the security and material advantages of living with others makes it far preferable to solitude. This kind of self-interested reasoning is predominant in 4p35s, 4p37s2 and TTP ch. 16, and is often readily

⁸⁴ Saar is incorrect but typifies a prevailing disinterest in the TP. §4.2.3 will argue for its significance.

attributed to the influence of Hobbes.⁸⁵ This argument has received more critical attention, and is popular with the egoist reading of Spinoza, which often presents it as the only argument Spinoza gives for communal participation (cf. §2.7; Curley, 1996, Malcolm, 2002, 484). I find it derivative, however, of a claim that is more interesting and consistent with the earlier metaphysics of power. This *collectivist argument* appears in various guises across 4p18s-p40s, and states that there is a superior good for the individual who joins with others of a common nature (4p18s). Not only will they increase their power exponentially with each person incorporated into their collective group ('an individual twice as powerful as each one', 4p18s, cf. 4p31), a greater power that any reasonable person will desire (4p20, 4p22-p27), but by extending the range and frequency of their bodily interactions, affecting and being affected by others as much as possible, their minds become capable of a great many more ideas (4p38-p40), thereby increasing their power collectively.

Taken together, both arguments support our points in §2.6.5 and advance our first claim: without the help of others, our lives will be cut short and marked by suffering (*self-interest*); not only do communities enable many of us to live in peace and happiness, they also facilitate the means by which we increase our understanding and enjoy our lives (*collectivist*). While the influence of passive affects makes individuals variable and inconstant (4p32-p34), jeopardising these reciprocal bonds of *commonality* – by which I mean a shared awareness of being of a common nature with another – the understanding and its basis in the knowledge of God offers a secure good which individuals can share in without discord (4p28, 4p35-p37). Thus belonging to a community is conditional to becoming freer, in his model, and communities are more powerful to the extent that they are proportionately composed of individuals living according to reason.

⁸⁵ While Hobbes is an obvious influence, Weststeijn (2012, 30-8, 145-50) argues that Boxhorn (professor at Leiden, where Spinoza is thought to have studied) and the De la Courts are also probable influences in asserting a self-interested, anti-social model of nature.

The necessity of collective belonging is made even more apparent in Spinoza's model of the free man at the close of Part 4. While Kisner takes this doctrine to be a 'thought experiment' (2011, 175), and Bennett merely forgotten material from an earlier draft (1984, §68.4), I urge that we take this material seriously, and as serving a practical function. The 'free man' serves the purpose set out in 4pref, to present an *exemplar* – meaning an ideal model or paragon – of human perfection by which to better conceive and compare how one becomes more reasonable and free.⁸⁶ It has what Sharp (2011, 107) calls a 'strategic' imaginative function, providing a model for critically understanding ourselves by – a 'Trojan horse', says Steinberg (2014, 196), by which reason's dictates suffuse memorably into the imagination. Of the doctrine's many striking features, one I believe overlooked by other commentators is its collectivist nature. The free man by nature is perfect, a perfection unattainable for actual human beings – he possesses absolute self-determination (4p66), resourcefully avoids danger (4p69) yet never has to tell any lies (4p72).⁸⁷ One would expect some kind of ascetic solitude to follow, but Spinoza is adamant that the free man actively seeks the friendship of others like him (4p71), and prefers to live in a state and obey its laws (4p73). Why?

Adherents to the self-interest argument can only suggest material gain, a kind of conative pragmatism perhaps, but this doesn't account for why he desires to aid others, as guided by reason. The free man avoids the favours of the ignorant because he 'strives to join

⁸⁶ LeBuffe describes it as one of three diagnostic models (2010, 175-9), but for a psychotherapeutic end that was criticised in the last chapter. Matheron's claim (1988, 155) that it is an ideal of human equality is implausible given its rhetorical purpose as an exemplar, and the distinction it makes between the ignorant/slave and the free man (4p66, 4p70-p71). The extent to which Spinoza can be considered egalitarian or anti-hierarchical is raised at the end of this section, and the curious role of exemplars unpacked in §3.4.

⁸⁷ Garrett, 1990 attempts to resolve the liar paradox by doing away with the necessity of emulating the free man, an analysis which would be clearer if he also conceded that it functions as an imaginative standard, an exemplar for conduct. Rosenthal (2002, 228-30) offers an excellent, nuanced critique of its exemplar function, 'beings of the imagination', which helps us imagine a more general standard for making value judgements, and is returned to in §3.4. Kisner is most critical of the free man's utility (2011, 162-7).

other men to him in friendship' and to 'lead himself and others by the free judgement of reason' (4p70). This necessitates avoiding anything that might affect in others sad passions (such as by appearing ungrateful, or overly grateful and partial to one person, rather than all), by which they might come to wish harm on the free man. Spinoza refers back to 4p37 here, which (alongside 4p35c1) argues that we are most useful to each other when we are guided by reason. There is some traction for the self-interest argument, in that there is personal gain in making others around us reasonable, as they become easier and more useful to live with.⁸⁸ But 4p37 also claims that the desire to bring it about that others also enjoy the good we strive after (i.e. empowerment, by reason) is increased the more knowledge we have. It increases exponentially, not out of any motivation for personal utility, but as a consequence of our own power – the more reasonable we are, the more we cannot help but aid others to become more capable, and share with us the happiness this results in.

By his nature then, the free man strives to help others – it is a feature of his own freedom. Yet if he is already 'perfect', functioning as an exemplar for the absolutely reasonable, self-determining model of human nature Spinoza would like us to imagine emulating, why should he want to actively seek the company of other free human beings (as 4p71 states)? Their friendship is 'necessary' (4p71dm), as through it the individual is guided to greater understanding of the world by their peers, has their enthusiasm for this knowledge intensified or reinforced by sharing it with others, and through it can *love*, that extraordinary capacity on which Spinoza rests the highest importance, and which is impossible alone.⁸⁹ Thus Spinoza's model is freer in a state (4p73), and so freely obeys its

⁸⁸ One motivated by self-interest (or 'Pride' as Spinoza might term it) would contain such formidable internal obstacles to knowledge that they could not act by the dictates of reason, and thus 'free'.

⁸⁹ While Spinoza is more unreservedly supportive of cheerfulness, fortitude, generosity and courage, the highest joy that his ethics recognises is love – the intellectual love of God, preceded only by a more general love of God. Perhaps he was cautious about endorsing love wholeheartedly, given how its affective attachments are the source of some of the saddest passions presented in *Ethics*. A foundational premise of Spinozan love might be that love is a quality of a relation, not of a loved object. A study of Spinozan love, as distinct from Spinozan desire, awaits completion – see, as starters, Nussbaum, 1994, Bernstein, 2000, and Smith, 2003, ch. 6.

laws, however unreasonable they are – anything that affords the cognitive, affective and material advantages of living with others is necessarily a good. To claim that it serves as merely a tool for a ‘self-reflective therapy’ (LeBuffe, 2010, 190) is to miss what is truly liberating about the model.

Once again, political life is central to Spinoza’s understanding of human freedom, but curiously he gives no account here of what forms of politically-organised communities are more successful in realising the common advantage of all.⁹⁰ Whatever form it might take, here I wish to draw attention to a more significant feature, that its overall good is measurable in the internal harmony of its constitutive parts. To his claim for mutual utility, Spinoza adds that one can ‘wish for no more than all should so agree in all things that the minds and bodies of all would compose, as it were, one mind and one body’ (4p18s). By the terms of the collectivist argument, human beings unite with others judged of a common nature, and the communities they form are stronger to the extent that they are unanimous, upon which reason is the most reliable basis. Yet the singularity of mind and body Spinoza envisions is not merely one of shared opinions, but reflects, I argue, an underlying (and underdeveloped) *unanimity hypothesis*. This hypothesis will not only be of relevant interest to Spinozists, but offers an invaluable means for conceiving interdependence and collectivity in a non-metaphorical way, and through this I can advance the section’s second claim.

§3.2.2 The Unanimity Hypothesis

To explore this, we return to 2p13s, the physical digression assessed in §2.3.1, and particularly what we observed in *b*), being Spinoza’s theory of individuation. To recap, all bodies are defined in terms of ‘motion and rest’ (2p13l1), and simple bodies combine into more complex ones that, to the extent they maintain this proportion in a certain and fixed

⁹⁰ Contra Matheron (1988) and Negri (2003), there is no textual evidence in the *Ethics* that Spinoza endorses democracy. One must be wary of conflating a modern universal sense of democracy with the classic, restrictive republicanism Spinoza and his Dutch contemporaries had in mind – see §4.5.2.

way, are individuals. This order of individuation extends infinitely, so that the whole of nature can be conceived as one individual composed of diverse parts that vary in infinite ways while remaining unified (2p13l7dm). Though incomplete, the digression accounts for composites like the human body, which remains in existence despite being constituted of diverse parts that renew over time, without a change in overall identity.

Indeed, readers like Bennett (1984, §26.2), Rice (1990, 272) and Barbone (2002, 91) have claimed that this peculiar passage can only be understood in terms of animal organisms. But Spinoza gives no sign that this model is said to apply to any particular thing, be it Seneca, a sparrow or a stone, while his remark about the ‘whole of nature’ permits us to consider a higher order of individuals than mere human beings. I wish to argue instead that Spinoza encourages us to consider communities as kinds of individuals, of varying strengths, and that this consideration appears, fleetingly, in *Ethics* and the TTP, and awaits the TP for a full exposition.⁹¹ This explains why it is necessarily good for human beings to associate with and assist each other, and why even Spinoza’s free man model of human perfection naturally strives to conjoin with others into a singular, unanimous mind and body. Both E4p37 and TTP 16.5 argue that humans naturally associate not out of fear of a greater evil, but for the greater good of security, prosperity and happiness, something only possible by combining ‘as one’ (*in unum*, TTP 16.5). Even in the most depleted and weakened of such societies, marked by fear and violence, all communities indicate the workings of a natural propensity in human beings to associate, and increase their powers in collective bodies and minds.

These collectives, as individuals, exist by the same laws as them, and so can be said to possess a greater or lesser proportion of adequate ideas to ignorant imaginings, and joyous

⁹¹ Textual instances of unanimity (people forming collectives and becoming of one mind/one body) include E4p18s, 4app12; TTP 3.5, 16.5; TP 2.13, 2.15-16, 2.21, 3.2, 3.5, 3.7, 6.1, and 8.6.

activity to fearful passivity. So long as they ‘communicate their motions to each other in a certain fixed manner’ (2p13a2”df), that is, maintain an internal organisation of their constitutive parts that collectively continues their persistence in being, then they are individuals. Thus a stability of interdependence and inter-relationality individuates them. Spinoza adds that individuals are ‘not distinguished in substance’, or the nature of their constitutive parts, but in the ‘union of bodies’ that results (2p13l4). These can be ‘affected in many ways’ and preserve its nature, so long as these affections are ‘retained’ by that individual (that is, they have some control over them), and the resulting motions are communicated to each other (2p13l7). In underdeveloped form, this amounts to what I am calling Spinoza’s unanimity hypothesis, which can be reduced to six premises:

1. Things combine into collectives, individuated by their internal equilibrium of parts (by 2p13)
2. These collective individuals are more powerful than if their constitutive parts acted alone (2p13, 3p6, 4p18, 5p8)
3. Conative perseverance in being includes striving to increase one’s power (3p6-p7, 3p9, 3p12)
4. Human beings experience this as a desire to join with others of a common nature (4p18s)
5. Reason is the most secure and unanimous basis of the common good (4p35, 4p37)
6. Reasonable communities persevere in being by correlating their collective desire with the common good.

The last premise is my inference from the previous five. By Spinoza’s reasoning, unanimity – a one-mindedness, or to get its parallelism right, a *one-mind-and-bodiness* – is what all will reasonably desire, and the common notions of the understanding offer the most secure way of establishing it among parties of varying affects and interests. We are conatively predisposed to allying with others and combining our efforts for the security, peace and

access to material goods this provides, but our ability to establish good relations with others depends in part on our own capabilities. *Commonality* is subjective – there are no hard facts about what we can or cannot judge as being of a common nature with us, and the imagination often plays the decisive part in determining how we judge the stranger a friend or enemy. But by Spinoza’s reasoning, the looseness of this category suggests that the more reasonable we become, the more we will extend our commonality to all human beings, and beyond.⁹² In this way the imagination becomes more capable by its greater constitution of desires and affects that arise more adequately, and one’s sense of commonality is extended by the acquisition of common notions.

I am not the first to draw a political implication from 2p13 with my reconstruction of the unanimity hypothesis. Two sets of readers have clustered around this passage with conflicting claims regarding its implications for political states, a debate which Rice (1990, 271) memorably distinguishes as the ‘literalist’ versus ‘metaphorical’ reading. The debate is initiated by Matheron’s 1969 *Individu et communauté chez Spinoza*, which uses 2p13 to claim that the political state has a literal individuality, or what he distinguishes as a ‘formal’ individuality (giving it unity and conative definition) as opposed to a ‘material’ one (composed of actual physical elements: 1988, 51-4). This state-individual is a ‘system of movements that, operating in a closed cycle, produces and reproduces itself constantly’ (1988, 346), constituted by social groups and institutions. Zac (1963, 225-6) and Bove (1996, 257; cf. §5.2.3) also make literalist readings to a lesser extent, with their presentation of a collective conatus. Rice adds Sacksteder to the literalist camp, with his over-simplified claim that the state is ‘a single power which constitutes the corporate body of any political order’ (1984, 208). The unanimity hypothesis differs from this reading in two ways: it does not load

⁹² In §3.4 I discuss the restrictive commonality of the Hebrew people; see §§5.3-4 for a more speculative account of commonality and its political uses. For further discussion of the ethical and political elements of similitude in Spinoza, see James (1996, 221-226) and Matheron (1994a).

the state with the explanatorily difficult burden of supra-individuality, but places it within the community of individuals, a move whose advantages will become clear. It also offers a more nuanced scale of individuation based on an internal capability – thus a literalist-type claim that ‘all states are individuals’ can be replaced with ‘communities can be individuals to greater or lesser extents’.

Rice however claims that any enterprise like ours is ‘wholly erroneous’: in his critique of Matheron, he warns against any unwarranted extension of Spinoza’s physics to political theory (1990, 271). His grounds for dismissal rely on Spinoza’s own vagueness about applying these models any further than 2p13, and on the claim that Spinoza’s politics does not explicitly treat the state as an individual. His counter-claim is initially flawed: the physical digression *does* inform the rest of the *Ethics* and its treatment of collective power,⁹³ while the TTP’s model of a ‘social contract’ and the TP’s presentation of civil harmony ‘as if one mind’ (*una veluti mente*: see §4.3) do give grounds to consider a unanimity to political bodies.

Rice solves some of these problems by claiming this is a ‘metaphorical’ understanding of the state-individual, wherein such an individuality is a very loose metaphor to describe the sum of relations within it. Here our unanimity hypothesis may become unstuck. McShea claims that Spinoza’s metaphysics is nominalist, thus any term for a collective individual like “society” refers only to collective nouns that describe various concrete individual relations (McShea, 1969, 133-43). Gueroult additionally cautions against reading the state as anything more than a ‘*dictamen Rationis*’ (1974, 170 n78). Instead, the metaphorical position of Rice (and Barbone, 2002 subsequently) is that Spinoza is interested only in the ‘organization of individual powers’ (Den Uyl, 1983, 71: one of this position’s main resources), and thus treats

⁹³ 2p13 and the axioms, lemmata and postulates derived are used to bolster many further propositions in Part 2, as one might expect, but they also appear across the remainder of *Ethics*: 3ps1-2, 3p3dm, 3p10dm, 3p17s, 3p51dm, 3agd, 4p18s, 4p39dm, 5p4dm, 5p23dm, and 5p29dm.

the state as an ‘aggregate whose members may, on occasion and depending on envioning conditions, operate in a more or less unified manner’ (Rice, 1990, 274-5). While their conclusions of a ‘radically individualist’ and ‘egoist’ Spinoza are rushed and weakly evidenced (given §2.7), the wider claim that political states – and, by extension, any unanimous collective individual – are merely metaphors for clusters of self-seeking individuals jeopardises our claims.

We can reaffirm the unanimity hypothesis without much difficulty: given Spinoza’s distrust of the polysemic nature of words and symbols,⁹⁴ it is most unlikely he would have rested such significance on what was intended merely as a metaphor or an *ens rationis*. Even by the terms of Rice and Den Uyl, an aggregate of individuals acting in a unified manner *is* an individual (albeit of a very weak, loosely unanimous sort), as the definitions of 2p13 above make clear. Thus there is no problem with describing an aggregate of individual relations as individuated, to the extent that they act in concert (it *is* in operating *as*, we claimed back in §2.3.1). Rice and Barbone rely too heavily on the unverified claim that 2p13 applies only to animal organisms, and construct a metaphor that effectively makes humanity a ‘kingdom within a kingdom’, apart from the natural order. Instead the naturally intelligible and universal process of individuation applies to all forms. This point may appear mystical, but everyday life supplies many examples of collective individuals, be they musical groups, sports teams, university departments, the citizenry of a city or nation-state, or even a group out for a walk (cf. §3.7). Yet we can also avoid the excesses of Matheron’s position by cautioning that unanimity applies to communities first, and that individuation reflects internal degrees of organisational power, in the form of a coherency and harmony of internal, interdependent relations.

⁹⁴ Spinoza makes a number of critiques of symbols, words and their polysemy in Part 2 which deserve further critical investigation – e.g. 2p18s, 2p40s, 2p43s and 2p49s.

Thus a large state marked by violence, fear or profound cultural differences may not amount to an ‘individual’ at all, but several, within a political administrative form. By taking into account 4p18s, 4p37, and adding 5p8 (‘[t]he more an affect arises from a number of causes concurring together, the greater it is’), we can derive a model of collective individuation *and* a basic means of distinguishing the relative power of some collective individuals over others.⁹⁵ It also allows us to appreciate, in abstract form, the force of universal claims for the disempowered: by conjoining together into collective forms that are organised, harmonious and guided by desires that correlate to their actual self-preservation, a collective can demand and even acquire rights previously denied to them, of which the history of political struggles gives innumerable examples. Our discussions from Chapters 1 and 2 will also caution the reminder that there is nothing normatively liberating about collectively-individuated powers, and Spinoza’s model of collective individuation can equally apply to more societally harmful and superstitious elements that organise themselves into ‘thought collectives’ (cf. Mirowski and Plehwe, 2009), propagating their doctrines through influential channels.

The controversy around 2p13 allows us to reassert our second claim, that communities can be individuals to varying extents, with the caveat, via the challenges of the metaphorical reading, that this individuality does not automatically apply to states, and can be observed in very few, in Spinoza’s time or since. It is my argument then that community is a better means for conceiving collective individuation – it provides a more stable and less stringent form for understanding collectivity, the process by which individuals conjoin with

⁹⁵ My staging of the ‘literalist’ and ‘metaphorical’ sides illustrates two different approaches but it should be clear that not all readers fall into either camp. Lloyd has written very perceptively on interconnection using 2p13 (1994, 10-11); see also Gatens and Lloyd, 1999, 120-2. Moreau (1994, 427-65) has also provided a good critical compromise, prioritising not individuation itself, but what kind of individual the state might be (I would again caution *could be*), through a scale of complexity. See also Balibar (2005, 88-90), for an excellent summary and resolution to some of these interpretative challenges. My reading differs in its identification and prioritisation of an emerging hypothesis of unanimity as a good, rooted in Spinoza’s accounts of sociality and individuation.

others they judge of a common nature, and act together. Smaller communities can either conjoin directly or indirectly into larger ones, which become collective individuals of varying power to the extent of their internal coherency and harmony, and the capability of the parts composing them. So long as this internal proportion of self-organisation is retained, the collective individual remains in existence, and, by deduction, it therefore falls under the conatus doctrine, and so possesses a conatus to persevere in its existence. The collective's individuality is an 'emergent property' – a property belonging to complex systems but not reducible to its constitutive parts – and, to give brief examples of commonplace collective individuals, the musicians of a band or citizens of a city realise a collective identity that is not entirely divisible to each member.⁹⁶

§3.2.3 Neither Pro-hierarchical nor Autonomous

Lastly, we can also comment in passing that this model of composite individuality renders Spinoza's metaphysics neither pro-hierarchical (as Lord, 2014 claims) nor anti-hierarchical (as Mack, 2010 claims, 5-7). Any composition of bodies of varying powers will necessarily involve the existence of difference on these grounds, and if this collective body is sufficiently complex, an awareness of this difference will also arise. Spinoza's description of political communities takes for granted that they are composed of many members of varying capabilities, and as Lord (2014, 72; cf. 2016, 367) rightly observes, Spinoza's ontology of power accepts that human beings are naturally unequal in power, in the sense that some individuals are more capable than others. In this respect, it would be inaccurate to claim that he is wholly anti-hierarchical. Some kind of organisational hierarchy is a prerequisite of the

⁹⁶ As far as I am aware, this is first time this claim about collective individuality as an emergent property in Spinoza has been made. There are however discussions of emergent properties in Spinoza with reference to panpsychism and the mind in Bennett, 1984, §33.3, and self and consciousness in Damasio, 2003, 325 n21.

collectives he imagines, and which enables its actions to be effective for the common good, and accountable to its members.

The model of collective individuality and power so far assembled in this chapter and the last instead allows us to conceive of an egalitarianism that suffuses all members as formally and politically equal but different contributors to this common good. Understanding, feeling, believing and desiring this common good all require some kind of socialisation or training in a collective imaginary. Spinoza's equivalence of natural right and power (§1.3) suggests that difference naturally arises, though his arguments for collectivity are premised on it empowering all members within it, a collective becoming-freer. By contrast, to claim that Spinoza's interest in people becoming more powerful entails 'not the dissolution but the promotion of hierarchy' (Lord, 2014, 60) is not sufficiently warranted. Even if Spinoza recognises that some are more naturally powerful than others (be it in terms of reason or virtue), there is nothing in his ethical or political thought that endorses elitism or hierarchy as a feature of the good life or of stable societies, and instead his thought identifies a more profound form of individual empowerment through the collective empowerment of all.⁹⁷

In sum, in this section we have derived a testable model of collectivity to apply in the next few sections, using 4p18s and the self-interest and collectivist arguments for communal participation. We read the free man doctrine in terms of its collectivism (§3.2.1), arguing that even a perfect human being is motivated by reason to combine with others, in order to maximise her/his own joys by sharing and experiencing them with others, acquire further knowledge about things, and because a capability for knowledge necessarily includes a desire to make others knowledgeable. Thus, Part 4 supplied us with an account of the

⁹⁷ I am grateful to Corin Bruce for sharing his unpublished essay "Spinoza and Social Hierarchy" (2015) analysing this debate, which argues persuasively for Spinoza as an anti-hierarchical thinker.

motivation and intrinsic rationality for becoming-collective, and its priority in Spinoza's ethical thought. The literalist/metaphorical controversy around 2p13 challenged us to explain what was meant by an individual (§3.2.2). I argued that collective individuals can exist, to the extent that what constitutes them exists together in a coherent, self-organised and relatively harmonious way. This meant cautioning against freely applying the term to states, as Matheron does, or even claiming that every community is individuated.

My reading correlates with Armstrong (2009, 59), Kisner (2011, 231-2) and Sangiacomo (2015, 19), who read Spinoza in terms of 'relational autonomy', a conceptual counter-model to traditional notions of freedom as an abstract, individualistic self-mastery, in favour of cooperative, nurturing and joyous relations as the basis of rationality and agency. Our one point of disagreement is in this notion of autonomy, which I find too limited to encompass what Spinoza sets out to achieve with becoming freer, which utilises the imagination and affects to enable as many people to become as free as they can, long before any Kantian notion of absolute self-direction arrives on the scene.

But how exactly can the imagination and affects do this? It remains for me to give an account. For we have also encountered a limitation at several points that threatens to render collectivity and the unanimity hypothesis uselessly abstract: how is collectivity effectively realised in actual human societies? What political forms are more conducive to unanimity than others? What prevents unanimity from becoming coercive conformity and the kind of servitude assessed in Chapter 1? To address the limitations of our still-theoretical account of collectivity and unanimity, I will now turn to the TTP and its analysis of the Hebrew Republic as an exemplar, though not exactly exemplary, of the kinds of unanimous collective individuals Spinoza proposes.

§3.3 True Prophets

Chapter 1 undertook an unusually lateral study of the TTP, avoiding the more well-beaten paths of democracy, critique of miracles, arguments for toleration or influence of Jewish philosophers, setting out instead to explore Spinoza's ideas about political servitude and its 'voluntary' basis. While noting the work's professed aims to spur truth-loving republicans (like those among the United Provinces' governing class) to disarm the growing popular authority of Calvinist ministers and protect freedoms of thought and speech, it mined into concepts of servitude (§1.2), natural right (§1.3), three laws of political reason (§1.4), *vulgus/populus* (§1.5), and obedience to reason (§1.6.2). In returning to the TTP for the remainder of this chapter, we will focus on one particular concept, collectivity, which draws on these while advancing our claims about desire, freedom and the collectivist argument for communal participation through the trickiness of actual human capability. For Spinoza repeatedly counsels against inflating the capacities of all to freely live according to reason. Human beings are 'no more obliged to live by the laws of a sound mind than a cat is by the laws of a lion's nature' (TTP 16.3) he warns, while the joys of a drunkard and a philosopher are 'of no small difference' (E3p57s; cf. §1.7). Yet *Ethics* ends with an endorsement of the rare and difficult path to freedom through adequate knowledge, whereas the TTP frequently admonishes the 'fickle' and 'capricious' *vulgus* for their incapacity to restrain their sad passions. This apparent distinction gives free rein to peculiar distortions, such as an inherent elitism (Strauss, 1988, 183) or an esoteric politics of multitudinal 'counter-Power' against all authority (Negri, 2003, 112).

The challenge facing our argument is to explain how Spinoza's politics aims at the becoming freer of as many people as possible, using means that are reasonable, i.e. empowering in an intelligible way, but which do not demand reason. One that can utilise what we learned of desire in §2.6, that it is determined by what it associates with joy and

sadness, affects that do not correlate to actual self-preservation. In analysing the application of collectivity and its intrinsic reason over the next three sections, I will also advance three of my own claims: firstly (§3.3), that prophets speak truthfully to the extent that they communicate reason through the imagination, and what this reflects about *a)* reason's equivalence with power, and *b)* what stands as prophecy since biblical times. Secondly (§3.4), that the social contract serves the function of a minimal, elementary descriptor of unanimity (and, by implication, is not merely lazy Hobbesianism). Thirdly (§3.5), that inadequate ideas like those of the imagination and passive affects are effective and suitable means for Spinoza's liberatory project of becoming freer, and serve a positive, non-elitist function for a reasonable collective individual's desire to increase its power.

In this section I will advance the first claim, while preparing the groundwork for reckoning with the positive uses of prophecy and imagination in Spinoza's politics. While Lord rightly warns against too freely assuming that 'epistemological positions lead to socio-political outcomes' (2011a, 340; cf. Peden, 2014, 259-263), the TTP's account of prophetic revelation and natural reason offers an invaluable means to assess the socially instrumental and intrinsically rational uses of imagination on a collective scale. Putting aside a lengthy historical account of the 1670 text (accomplished elsewhere, see note 15 above), we can recognise the strategic importance of Spinoza's decision not to emulate his friends Meyer and Koerbagh (or Maimonides before that), who had either elevated reason as the right interpreter of scripture, or separated the two realms altogether (Israel, 2001, chs. 10-11; cf. Malcolm, 2002, 387-92).⁹⁸ In the first five chapters of the TTP Spinoza instead carries out an extraordinary heist that exceeds anything by Hobbes, La Peyrère, Ibn Ezra or other unorthodox biblical criticism: he tunnels beneath prophecy and the basis of scriptural law to

⁹⁸ To avoid confusion, Spinoza does set out to separate theology from philosophy (e.g. Pref.10, 11.9, 13.2, and ch. 14), however it is my claim in the next three sections that he effectively makes religion political and philosophical, a transmitter for compelling collective narratives that instil socially reasonable behaviours.

demolish its foundations as divine law, while simultaneously restoring its significance as truth on a new criterion of natural reason. Spinoza's desire to restore truth to some prophecy may well be partly motivated by personal expediency, that is, avoiding publishing anything blasphemous that might get him jailed, but I wish to argue that a more interesting and hitherto under-examined feature of it is the function it serves. Its truth is instrumental, in inculcating narratives, beliefs and images that enable a disparate group of individuals to conjoin into a collective identity, and interact in ways that are cooperative, peaceful, and mutually assisting – thereby strengthening that collective individuality and the powers of those within it. I will now unpack this condensed claim.

Spinoza's critique of prophetic revelation can, to a degree, rightly be construed as a foundation for the later Enlightenment assault on revealed religion. Israel leads this argument: 'no one else during the century 1650-1750 remotely rivalled Spinoza's notoriety as the chief challenger of the fundamentals of revealed religion, received ideas, tradition, [and] morality' (2001, 157). Yet this does not explain why Spinoza dismantles revealed religion only to restore it as an instrumental and universal social good. Chapter 1 defines prophecy as 'certain knowledge about something revealed to men by God' (TTP 1.1), and then goes on to argue why natural knowledge presents a more reliable basis for understanding God (and is indeed 'divine', TTP 1.3) than that possessed by a prophet. The prophet's revelation depends on the imagination alone, which is itself a 'capricious and changeable' knowledge (1.30), resulting in a vast number of contrary descriptions of God (1.29, cf. 2.9-11). Chapter 2 states that prophecy is 'inferior to natural knowledge' (2.3), and warns that 'those who look in the books of the prophets for wisdom and a knowledge of natural and spiritual things are completely on the wrong track' (2.1). It would seem by Spinoza's reasoning that prophecy is an inferior, obsolete, if not dangerous basis for knowledge. Our highest good is in 'the knowledge and love of God' (4.5), and consequently God's commands are simply the 'means required' to realise this in human actions, and the

‘rule of life’ this entails is divine law. Given that these are naturally intelligible, all the worship of God need require is a sound understanding.

Yet this is a criterion far beyond what most human beings are naturally capable of, without a good deal of education, maturity, motivation and social stability, a problem raised earlier in §1.3. The virtue of prophets is their persuasiveness. The prophets ‘had a unique and extraordinary virtue, and cultivated piety with a unique constancy of purpose’ (1.26), and what they lacked in philosophical reasoning, they made up for in vividness of imagination (1.20). What distinguishes a true prophet from a false one then is not the content of their vision or doctrine, but its instrumental social benefit, being directed to ‘what is right and good’ (2.5), or ‘piety and constancy’ (1.13). James aptly calls Spinoza a ‘social epistemologist’ in this regard: the truth of the ‘true religion’ that the prophet propagates (cf. §3.5) is in the social behaviours it produces, namely ‘to love and live in a steadily cooperative fashion’ (2011, 187; cf. LeBuffe, 2015, 329). This is what I referred to in §2.6 as reason’s ontological significance, its equivalence with power – claim *a*) of this section. The truths it guides us to are intrinsically empowering, and their basis in truth is that they enable our flourishing. Albeit unconsciously, the true prophet supplies what Gatens and Lloyd call ‘socially shared fictions’ (1999, 124) – illusions that administer real effects, and are instrumentally true in the shared good they realise. But a term like fiction misleadingly suggests a benign dictatorship, like Plato’s noble lie. The anthropologist Clifford Geertz instead encourages us to understand ‘fiction’ by way of its etymological root (*fictio*), being “‘something made”, “something fashioned”, collectively, and not merely something ‘false, unfactual, or merely “as if” thought experiments’ (1973, 15). These are not socially convenient fictions with which the masses are duped, but *collective narratives* that individuals participate in, with greater or lesser abilities to co-produce a reasonable, unanimous collective form. Spinoza’s argument considers how the prophet is able to

persuade others of the common good of unanimity through fashioning a narrative within which they can participate and transform, collectively.

Chapter 3 of the TTP introduces Moses to indicate what piety amounts to: the common good, that which enables the preservation of a given community to 'live securely and in good health' (3.5). This accomplishment is dependent upon many external causes, and best realised by the guidance of 'wise and vigilant' leaders, no matter how weak their philosophical understanding. Their rationality is expressed in their imaginative gifts and their intuitive grasp of social truths, like the laws of political reason. Here is the truth of unanimity, that human beings naturally depend on one another for their existence (5.7), yet are often divided and a danger to each other by their passionate, self-interested and irrational behaviour (5.8). The power and truth of a prophet lies in intuiting and propagating influential narratives that persuade individuals in a community to act according to the dictates of reason (5.9; cf. 14.11, 16.5), that is, cooperatively and peacefully.

Moses is the exemplary prophet in Spinoza's account, and his paradigmatic case is addressed in the following section. At this stage we can note that his rationality consists in being a legislator, devising laws that obliged the stateless, recently-enslaved Hebrew people with a series of commands and a compelling collective identity as a 'nation' and 'God's chosen people' that was accessible to their weakened condition (2.15), and 'childish understanding' (3.2).⁹⁹ The efficacy of these laws lies not so much in their actual content,¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Spinoza's paternalism is intentional, reoccurring via Moses at 2.15, and again at 16.10, comparing the subject to a child obeying a parent's instruction mostly for its own good, unlike the slave, who must obey instructions for the master's benefit.

¹⁰⁰ The significance of ceremonial customs lies only in how they cohere a collective around a shared set of observances, and echoing claim *a*) of this section, they are instrumentally true to the extent they preserve a state. Thus Spinoza notes how rites like circumcision or xenophobic nationalism helped preserve the Hebrews even after the dissolution of their state, just as other customs like the topknot were thought to preserve the distinctness of Chinese national identity (TTP 3.12). In this way communities become individuated by a shared *ingenium* or socio-cultural 'character', institutionally transmitted to its members through affects, images and disciplined habits. On the importance of *ingenium*, see Read, 2016, 24-25.

but that the Hebrews were persuaded to obey them, and even freely did so. This latter point is important: any laws based on fear alone will be experienced as a burden, and will be disobeyed as soon as the civil authority commanding them is seen to be weak or absent (5.8). By contrast, laws that involve some 'hope of something good which they [the subjects] very much desire' are most effective, for each person 'will do their duty willingly' (5.9; cf. §1.4).

James has observed that laws that encourage subjects to freely obey not only strengthen the state, they also serve a quasi-vitalist function in stirring passive 'sluggish spirits' into more active civic participation (2008, 130; cf. 2009a, 238). Gatens too observes that one 'acts *directly*' (2009, 197) in freely obeying the law, whereas one acts indirectly and passively when one acts out of fear or ignorant submission, and this state can never be good, no matter the content of the law. These claims are further illustrated by Rosenthal's (2013) recent elevation of 'participation' in Spinoza's political philosophy, wherein the most secure state is one that elicits the greatest participation or activity among its constitutive parts – an activity which also amounts to the individual's own freedom. All these readings correlate with the argument introduced in §2.6.2, of freely accepting what is necessary – even in adverse circumstances, the agent can establish some control of their own effects, and that any kind of self-directing activity, even where one cannot act otherwise, is necessarily a good for that agent.

While Spinoza allows his sharp humour to slip into the text ('[s]ince we have no prophets in our day so far as I know': 1.6), it is clear that prophets fulfil a foundational societal function. It is one akin to our maximising desires-joys test in §2.6.4, achieving a reasonable effect (self-preservation of a community) by using vivid narratives and strong passive affects to disarm socially harmful beliefs and desires, and re-connect them to socially-preserving and enjoyable ones. Gatens and Lloyd describe this as resolving conflicts

between 'the chains of associations of different minds' (1999, 25) which engender mutual distrust and fear, and Ravven (2002, 197) describes how prophets transform the 'common order of imaginative associations' in a number of minds. Their gifts enable them to undertake this work on a collective scale, transforming the internal associations in the hearts of large sections of a given population to become more cooperative, gregarious and compassionate (a process akin to the education of joy in §2.6.1).

We can therefore agree with James that the 'genius of the prophet lies in the ability to employ images or stories that appeal to the situation and temperament of a specific people' (2008, 133). Local knowledge and sad and joyous passions are instrumentally applied in the service of social reason, and it is through a compelling recapture of the collective imagination that the prophet alters what affects are associated with desires. The prophet intuitively grasps the inextricably imaginative nature of the political, that 'politics is necessarily mediated by images and associations', as Saar writes (2015, 116). While Lordon suspiciously warned against this process as 'co-linearisation' and 'enlistment' (2014, 79-80; §1.6.1), it also has liberating possibilities, as Spinoza observes, and which a flourishing set of recent feminist readings like those drawn on here also indicate. This enterprise also reflects the very 'institutional determinants' like laws, political forms, ceremonial observances, customs, languages and other belief systems that produce unanimity, as Gatens and Lloyd also note (1999, 117). By our conceptual work earlier in §3.2, the processes whereby a human being reorders their associations of desires and joys also apply to higher-order individuals like communities, to the extent that they are already sufficiently unanimous that these ideas can be communicated among their parts.

However, this prioritising of prophecy and its use for collectivity in effect reverses Spinoza's own epistemic hierarchy of 2p40s: imagination is now key, being the most universal, common, and by that token, influential form of knowledge. This wrests influence

over collective ideas from reason-loving philosophers to a less reliable set of ambitious individuals, disposed by their inadequate and incorrect imaginings about God to impose images of divine law onto others. By any measure, this imperils any community whose members are intellectually underdeveloped and vulnerable to superstition, and all the problems of domination in §1.2.3 this entails. Either the sovereign will have to utilise certain prophets over others to inculcate the common good, or they will have to impose the strictest civil restrictions to guarantee obedience (like Moses does, and as the Ottomans continue: 5.11, Pref.6). Neither option is preferable. Instead, a more worthwhile strategy connects these imaginings with effects and activities that produce a capability to think and live reasonably that is at least partially self-directed by subjects themselves. For as we discussed in §2.6.1, it is through passive affects and the imagination that one is led to observe common notions. James nicely describes this as cultivating an ‘imaginatively-grounded social ethos that is hospitable to the second kind of knowledge’ (2011, 192). These social common notions in turn allow distrustful individuals to combine together and, as Gatens and Lloyd also observe, develop their weakened states of hope and fear into collective bonds of ‘reason and fellowship’ (1999, 94).

This seems to be where Spinoza is heading: his recommendations for the reform of the Dutch state in Chapter 18 all concern the separation and subordination of church to state, and laws to protect liberties around religious worship, speech, and philosophical research (18.3-6). This should prevent most reasonable persons from conjoining with seditious theologians and endangering the collapse of the state. Yet it is striking that the prophets and their collective narratives have no place in Spinoza’s remedies for the faltering Dutch republic. One can smirk at the absence of prophets in one’s own day, but by Spinoza’s own reasoning, there is a truth in prophecy that might have been better heeded. At its best, it is a socially beneficial, instrumental form of reason that inculcates cooperative behaviours through compelling narratives that appeal to as many minds as possible. Thus while Spinoza

professes not to believe in claim *b*), that since Jesus Christ there have been no prophets (and no need for any, cf. 4.10), his reasoning leads to the awkward conclusion that their social epistemology can be observed in most societies, and that their effects can be instrumentally reasonable.

From what has been argued in this section, prophecy can supply narratives, images, affects and beliefs which enable a group of individuals to extend their bonds of commonality with each other, interact enthusiastically as a collective, and experience their own efforts and desires in this collective as unanimous or *of* the community. Yet while its use of the imagination reflects an overarching social truth about how many people think and feel, any claims of its basis in the verbal commandments of an anthropomorphic God is necessarily absurd and likely to ultimately stifle the capabilities of a given collective. Instead the virtue of a true prophet is in producing narratives tailored to these capabilities, enabling a collective to recognise common notions and start becoming self-determining, and at least partial causes of their own affects and ideas.

This is akin to the optimistic nutritionist of §2.5.2, who redirects the child's sweet-eating desires to healthier alternatives through incentives that appeal to the child. The most effective nutritionist of all, I argued, was one who enabled the child to recognise why eating healthier alternatives was best, so that its desires were as self-directed and active as possible. When I later claimed for an education of joy (§2.6.1), it was just this kind of process I had in mind: we desire what we associate with joy or the decrease of sadness, yet these associations are often founded on inadequate ideas. Hence some affective re-programming will help us associate joys with relations that actually correlate to their self-preservation, resulting in more maximal and intense joys. In this way, the emergence of ethical and political agency begins at the level of imaginative associations.

This leads to the tantalising implication that becoming-collective, or any political change for that matter, occurs through an education of the imagination. The power of true prophets is not only in producing compelling, socially instrumental narratives, but in also extending or transforming collective imaginings with new images and ideas that transform the beliefs of a collective group. To put this implication more concisely: *we are only capable of what we can already imagine*. Once again, Spinoza's insecurity around claim *b*) need not deter us from assessing its general political application. Imagining need not be merely a passive or instrumental process, but also an active and empowering element of collectivity. In the next section we pursue this difficult claim.

§3.4 Hebrew Republic

The TTP's analysis proceeds in an organised fashion, moving from prophecy and natural reason to biblical criticism, and scripture's overarching teaching of obedience, before shifting clunkily onto political matters in Chapter 16. Spinoza's editorial decision then to return to Moses and the Hebrew Republic to illustrate his political principles (over chs. 17-18) may at first seem like a back-step to readers. But it is most likely that he had begun to heed some of his own inconvenient conclusions, like those deduced in the last section regarding prophecy and the imagination. In presenting the example of the Hebrew Republic, Spinoza was deploying a model that would stir the imaginations of his audience. Many leading figures in the United Provinces compared their state to the Hebrew Republic established by Moses. Dutch political theorists like Althusius and Grotius described it as a model for a perfectly organised and wise state, while Cunaeus produced an influential and laudatory study of the Hebrew Republic in 1617, freely comparing its federal structure, agrarian law and election by God to the Dutch people (see James, 2012, 266-9). As a relatively 'young' republic, the Dutch sought national exemplars with which to project and reflect on their identity. In choosing the example of Moses the lawgiver, whose painting

hung prominently in Amsterdam Town Hall from 1664 (cf. Rosenthal, 2002, 225), Spinoza sought to pluck patriotic heartstrings as well as further unpack his biblical exegesis in a specifically political manner.

In this section, we will explore what Spinoza does with the exemplar of the Hebrew Republic. The discussion will begin by reconstructing Spinoza's account, introducing the claim that the social contract is a minimal descriptor of unanimity, and that the emergence of the Hebrew Republic illustrates its workings. In the following section, which logically follows, we will then evaluate two contrary interpretations of Spinoza's exemplar, one that it is *exemplary* (i.e. favourable), the other that it is *elitist*, before outlining my own middle position using the universal religion, where I will apply Spinoza's cautious politics of unanimity.

Moses is first introduced by Spinoza as a paternalistic lawgiver, uniting the divided and uneducated Hebrew tribes as they wandered through the Sinai Desert with a set of commands that would compel them to live together peacefully (2.15). He devises laws apt for their limited understanding (3.2), and helps them realise a unanimity of a weak sort, defined by passive obedience to externally-imposed laws (4.9, 5.3, 5.11). Concerned only with the survival of the Hebrew community, Spinoza turns Moses' religion into a politics, with the resulting Judaic religion being the legacy of this prior political imperative. Chapters 7-13 concern biblical criticism, and over these Spinoza advances the not altogether original claim that Moses did not author the Pentateuch (e.g. 8.5),¹⁰¹ but it awaits Chapter 17 before the actual politics of the Hebrew Republic and its state-religion is unpacked.

This occurs in an intriguing fashion: after immediately putting aside the 'merely theoretical' (17.1) claims of the previous chapter, with its doctrines of the social contract, natural right, and its three laws of political reason (cf. §§1.3-4), Spinoza presents a problem

¹⁰¹ Malcolm (2002, 391-431) gives useful detail of prior criticism by Ibn Ezra, La Peyrère and Hobbes.

of obedience. A state's durability relies 'chiefly upon the loyalty of its subjects, their virtue and constancy in executing commands' (17.4), yet if its subjects are possessed by sad passions and determined by pride, envy and fear to harm their peers and ignore the common good of the state (i.e. the internal servitude mapped in Chapter 1), then it faces ruin. What we would recognise by our unanimity hypothesis is still for Spinoza undeveloped, and so this issue of internal division is instead depicted in terms of a 'capricious multitude' (ibid.) who threaten to dissolve the state through their violent passions and greed, thereby requiring the paternalistic direction of wise leaders.¹⁰² It is in this context of historical leaders who exploit religion to secure their states that Moses reappears.

From the outset, the Hebrew Republic is presented as a model for establishing political stability. Where the regimes of Alexander or the Roman emperors failed by turning their subjects into 'slaves useless to themselves' (17.6), Moses' state succeeded in encouraging the Hebrews to surrender their natural right freely, and expressly in an oath (17.7). We considered earlier how freely and willingly obeying laws strengthened both subjects and the state itself. While Moses' ability as an imaginative prophet and authoritarian lawmaker helped instil a collective identity which brought together the Hebrews as a distinctive nation, the nature of their social contract was just as instrumentally reasonable. Established by a stateless people wandering in a desert, it is a peerlessly concise model of how an elementary social contract is established, one that by verbal agreement transforms a group of people into the subjects of a particular sovereign.¹⁰³ Yet unlike Hobbes' fixation with verbally binding oaths and outward conformity ('profession with the tongue is but an external thing': 1998a, XLII.11), Spinoza's less-theoretical discussion elaborates how a contract is only as good as the utility in obeying it (16.6; cf. Garrett,

¹⁰² Spinoza's dismissive language around the *vulgus* and *multitudo* is partly an inheritance from his Roman sources who adopt such a perspective, like Tacitus, Quintus Curtius and Cicero.

¹⁰³ The social contract or covenant is typically *pactum* – Spinoza's shift from a contractualist language to one of immanent investment of power is explored in §4.4.

2010).¹⁰⁴ Thus the virtue of the Hebrew social contract is its contingency – it is made and remade, and its virtue is in the unanimity of the collective individual it realises, and this is my own claim that I wish to make in this section.

It places the Hebrews in a ‘dual-aspect’ state, as James puts it (2012, 270), a theocracy-democracy. Spinoza follows Josephus (and Cunaeus) in describing Moses’ state as a ‘theocracy’ (17.8), in that the Hebrews first agree to be governed by ‘God’ directly, and then out of fear of God’s wrath, are compelled by Moses to establish a second covenant transferring the power to interpret laws to Moses. At the same time it is a ‘democracy’, in that ‘all remained perfectly equal as a result of this agreement’ (17.9). Even after the second covenant under Moses, features of popular empowerment remain, which Spinoza recounts approvingly in some detail, such as its citizen-militia, its education of the people in the state’s laws every seven years, its distribution of executive powers among the federated tribes, its communal ownership of property and its redistribution of debts (17.17-25).¹⁰⁵ In its prophetic appeal to divine authority, and its institutionalisation of private religious practices into the state, the Hebrew Republic offered an exemplary case of how ‘self-interested individuals in the state of nature are willing to surrender their natural rights and create a sovereign power to which they become subject in a civil society’ (Rosenthal, 2002, 227). Moses achieves what we described at the end of §3.3: a re-programming of what is imaginable, so that what the Hebrews associated with ‘self-interest’ (or, by our own established definitions, *desire*) became more correlated with the common good.

The exemplar is a thorny one: readers know it does not survive, and Spinoza’s treatment of its downfall is tuned to Dutch ears. In reserving to the Levites the exclusive

¹⁰⁴ ‘Were it as easy to control people’s minds as to restrain their tongues’ (20.1), Spinoza replies to Hobbes. The argument for free speech is premised on the irrepressibility and inalienability of it, e.g. 20.3. See Sharp, 2011, 44 on the tongue as an instrument of ‘collective sovereignty’.

¹⁰⁵ Cunaeus had made a number of these observations previously (cf. James, 2012, 268). Elsewhere Nelson argues for the influence of the Hebrew Republic on other early modern political theorists like Harrington, Hobbes and Locke, but disparages the lasting influence of Spinoza (2010, 130-4).

right to interpret laws, and the material necessity for the other tribes to financially support them, Moses' constitutional model was intrinsically divided and weak (17.26-9). The priests are disobeyed and eventually the state becomes a monarchy. With their popular sovereignty ended, and thus the incentives for freely obeying the laws gone, the collective desire realising their social contract came undone, its affects and images dissipated into less unifying forms. Spinoza counsels readers that a similar storm of monarchical and ecclesiastical ambition faces the Dutch, threatening similar ruin. The exemplar is thus double-edged, indicating what can be imitated and what can be learned from (cf. 17.30, 18.1). Spinoza thus prescribes an Erastian programme, suborning religious law to civil law, placing legislative power undivided into the hands of the sovereign, and ensuring this sovereignty is collectively held and draws on the active participation of the populace.

Yet something quite remarkable also happens here, in an argumentative strategy soon outmoded by events, and which pays little heed to the TTP's own earlier arguments. My description of Spinoza's arguments for religious toleration and free speech may seem unduly critical, but they appear in the text precisely where prophecy is refuted and, although for very good reasons, rely on weak epistemological bases. Drawing general political principles from the Hebrew state like those summarised above, Spinoza warns vehemently against allowing prophets any liberty. The prophets 'had more success', he claims, 'in antagonising than reforming people by means of the liberty by which they usurped to admonish, scold and rebuke' (18.4). Spinoza notes that the number of prophets greatly increased during the Kingdom(s) of Israel, and is right to warn how such ambitious, ignorant figures usurp what is universal knowledge, the knowledge of God, and use it to terrorise and dominate others. But here he conflates prophecy with superstition, and in casting out the basis of prophetic revelation in the affects and imagination, he has no medium with which to inculcate the utility and benefits of a republican religious pluralism and toleration in the first place. What I wish to argue is that in his haste to assert his own intellectual desires, Spinoza forgets the

sound social epistemology accomplished elsewhere in the TTP and indeed *Ethics*. Lacking a robust unanimity composed of a greater proportion of adequate ideas and strong joyous affects, the desires of the Dutch *plebs* can be overwhelmed by more powerful affects of fear and hate. Appealing to reasonable free speech in a population undereducated, frustrated and disempowered is as absurd as expecting a cat to ‘live by the laws of a lion’s nature’, and so events prove.

I am holding Spinoza to an unfair standard, that of prophecy of another kind, but in leaving no room for the socially reasonable role of imagination in the last part of the TTP, Spinoza’s argumentation seems inconsistent and overstretched. His observation of three elementary laws of human societies lacks the more cautious affective insights of Part 3 of *Ethics*, whereby we see the better and do the worse, and our prior imaginative associations lead us to associate our desire, greater good or the people’s welfare with beliefs and affects that may not realise it, but actually hinder it. Thus the TTP can only berate the fickle and capricious *vulgus*, a weakly-unanimous and fearful individual, whereas the *Ethics* encourages us to draw on reasonable ideas to isolate the causes of our desires, and re-programme them to result in more enjoyable, self-preserving behaviours. While endorsing prophecy during an era of Millenarianism and would-be messiahs would have been absurd, Spinoza leaves unaccounted for the socially instrumental power of the imagination to instil and reinforce reasonable collective identities that are popular, compelling, and inspire civic involvement – say of a republican kind, that might have energised the Dutch people, and enabled them to develop social common notions.

So having derived an account of collective individuation and presented a unanimity hypothesis, in the last section and this one we have explored how unanimity has been produced and communicated via the imagination, most often through prophets. While a dangerous and unreliable social force, prophets at their best indicate the instrumentally true

and socially reasonable use of the imagination to inculcate cooperate, peaceful behaviours among disparate individuals. In this section we have focused on the Hebrew Republic as an exemplar, not just one fitting for the Dutch United Provinces, but one that best illustrates the functions of the social contract as a continual investment by a collective in their unanimous strength. The history of their state indicates the strengths and weaknesses of imagination *and* political constitution in that form. While Spinoza's own conclusions from this exemplar have been criticised here, they do indicate one last feature to discuss in the next section, and throughout the next chapter: the necessity of popular sovereignty, that is, popular self-rule, to ensure a state's stability. The extent to which the Hebrew Republic was unanimous and democratic will be the basis of assessing two conflicting interpretations of its meaning in Spinoza's politics.

§3.5 Universal Faith

There has been a tension throughout this chapter between the metaphysical good of collectivity and unanimity, and the frequency (if not inevitability) of compelling sad passions that undo these bonds, and which are put to work by superstitious authorities to compel obedience. Sangiacomo describes these as 'vicious' and 'virtuous' cycles of affects (2015, 21-2), and readers as diverse as Deleuze (1988, 128), Israel (2001, 220) and James (2012, 130) have compared Spinoza to Nietzsche, Marx and Freud, in supposing that what most people believe about the world is mostly wrong, yet still offering a profoundly liberating project of human freedom. In this section I wish to explore this striking ambivalence at the heart of Spinoza's project for becoming freer. I will present and compare two interpretations of the Hebrew Republic that I term either *exemplary* or *elitist*. I then derive a cautious politics of collectivity from it, using the example of the universal faith in Chapter 14 of the TTP.

Over §3.4 I drew on a number of readers who consider the Hebrew Republic an exemplar of Spinoza's politics, an ideal model of how popular sovereignty, collective

imaginings and a more equal distribution of power resulted in a resilient state-form under Moses. The most forthright is Ravven, who claims that the 'original Mosaic state was in principle, an egalitarian, federalist, and even partially socialist, direct democracy with... a wide division of power' (2002, 212). Ravven's argument is premised on a claim that is common in the exemplary reading, that religion is a socially expedient 'moral educator and instrument of social cohesion' (ibid., 210) and one that has been historically necessary in the development of most societies. Ravven praises Moses for helping establish a state which elevates the 'will of the people' and 'independence of mind as its cardinal virtue', and a second feature of the exemplary reading is the over-elevation of the first Hebrew state, between God and the Hebrews directly, which, with some technical reconstruction, tenuously correlates to a democracy.¹⁰⁶ James advances a similar claim, highlighting Moses' exceptional imaginative abilities to inculcate voluntary obedience and unity through his laws, in a state where 'obedience to God *was* obedience to the people' (2012, 270), the former reduced to a ruse for the latter. Balibar makes the claim even more stridently: 'Theocracy is the *imaginary* institution of society as democracy' (1997a, 184), a collective projection onto a mythical God of their sovereign power. Gatens also highlights the role of public religion as a normative 'fictional device' that establishes a society, from which civil life, morality and philosophy can emerge (2009b, 467-8). Both Gatens and Rosenthal also draw a comparison between the Hebrew Republic and the free man, with Rosenthal stressing its exemplary role in transforming self-interest and subjective utility into a public morality of obedience to the common good (2002, 227).

If not as laudatory as Ravven, the others still consider the Hebrew Republic as exemplary for Spinoza, an instrumental yet necessary deployment of religion for the secret

¹⁰⁶ Spinoza does claim that the Hebrews' first covenant with God directly (not via Moses) was a 'democracy' (TTP 17.9), though his glossing over why under Moses it did not become a monarchy is weak.

purpose of the common good. It is a theological-political means for demonstrating his democratic republican ideals in a form most persuasive to Dutch readers. I find much to commend this view, and have sided with it over §§3.3-4 in exploring Spinoza's interest in the imagination as a collective form of knowledge. Yet our own findings from Chapter 1 force us to question how any state organised along lines of the strictest supernatural obedience can possibly be accepted as a positive exemplar. We find in a number of political theorists from across the ideological spectrum a far more critical assessment of Spinoza's Hebrew Republic, which I call the elitist position. I will give two simplified (and contrary) variants of it, beginning with Leo Strauss.

Though Strauss produced numerous studies of Spinoza, it is his later treatment of persecution that is most incisive. In it Strauss claims that Spinoza's philosophy contains two doctrines – an inoffensive, exoteric, vulgar 'pseudo-philosophy' for the general reader, iterated in Spinoza's endorsements of democracy, free speech, religious piety and the Hebrew State, and an esoteric 'true teaching' concealed within the text for disciples and posterity (1988, 154-156; cf. 186-187). This leads to an unlikely endorsement of elitism, that Spinoza advocated an exoteric democratic politics that would stabilise his state and appease the '*vulgi*', while using his *Ethics* to develop an esoteric and rigorously rational philosophy for elites. Thus the Hebrew Republic, and Spinoza's doctrine of the universal faith, are all means for what Wolfson called a 'religion of reason' (1962, II 328), a strategic device that inculcates rational precepts through the imagination in a way that would not otherwise be possible (or perceptible).¹⁰⁷ Strauss' reading relies heavily on a tenuous dependence on Maimonides' self-expressed method of concealment, and while the reading is dogged by unverifiable interpretative claims, it does share a premise with our exemplary reading, in

¹⁰⁷ The neo-Kantian philosopher Hermann Cohen criticised Spinoza's state-religion as elitist. Peculiarly, Strauss challenges Cohen on this, only to affirm Spinoza's anti-democratic elitism in later life. On Cohen and Strauss, see Copulsky, 2014, 40-3; on Strauss's Spinozism, see Levene, 2004, 10-12; Yovel, 1989, 144.

that both treat the imagination as a necessarily inferior but socially instrumental form of knowledge. Den Uyl is one notable subsequent commentator who derives a 'Hero-Founder' theory of politics out of the Hebrew Republic, ascribing the collective agency of the Hebrews to Moses alone, using his 'passion to rule' to derive a Randian politics of natural hierarchy (1983, 27), of which he approves.

The second variant is more sympathetic to the thesis' central argument for a politically liberatory Spinoza, and so our differences with these authors, some of whom were discussed in §1.2.3, will illuminate the distinctiveness of my approach. Unlike the exemplary readers, they see nothing salutary in Moses' state-religion of obedience. We will recall Althusser's remark that Spinoza exposes the '*materiality of the very existence of ideology*' (1997, 10) in his treatment of the Hebrew Republic. In identifying the socially constitutive role of the imagination, Spinoza actually sought to persuade readers of its illusory and false nature, according to Althusser (1997, 5-7), and a lesser extent Tosel (1984, ch. 2, which freely draws on Strauss). In detailing the narratives, beliefs and ceremonial customs that constituted the Hebrew Republic, Montag claims that Spinoza accounts for religion as a 'disposition of bodies' which produces a mental effect of submission or 'consent', and in this 'ability to move bodies' lies the 'secret of despotism' (1999, 49). Thus in a kind of reversal of Strauss' elitism, these readings claim that by offering such a repressive state politics of obedience as an apparent exemplar, Spinoza was actually striving to propagate an esoteric 'politics of permanent revolution' (Montag, 1999, 84). Negri goes furthest, making the teleological inference that Spinoza's politics was oriented to a 'time-to-come' (2004, 10), one in which the very restrictiveness of his political exemplar in the TTP indicates how the imagination might re-constitute the power of the multitude (2003, 97-8).

Both readings broadly share the observation that imagination is a weak form of knowledge capable of producing collective social effects, and for an expedient political end

– they disagree more in whether those ends are good or bad. The exemplary reading heralds the Hebrew Republic as a good model of the kind of secure polity needed to establish a greater degree of philosophical freedom, and possessing enough virtues in itself that other states might emulate it. The elitist reading identifies it as a negative model for how false narratives inculcate political obedience that represses the multitude or *vulgi* from becoming more powerful, with Strauss and Den Uyl diverging in considering this a positive feature. While the exemplary reading usually stems from a far more rigorous assessment of Spinoza’s historical context and objectives in the TTP, it still supposes a politically unsavoury premise that I think we can do without, while holding onto the goods of unanimity and collective power that it heralds. This is the premise that there was an instrumental good in making the Hebrews obedient to ‘God’, and passively subject to external laws which they obeyed without thinking – a form of servitude we defined as s_5 back in §1.2.2. I also think we can do without inferring any anachronistic and esoteric claims that the elitist reading makes, which it cannot textually substantiate. What I will now argue for instead is a middle reading, one that reconstructs Spinoza’s mixed views to claim that while inculcating cooperative behaviours in a collective is a necessary good, the Hebrew Republic was not exemplary in that it did not enable its constituent parts to think for themselves, and thus was a passive and very weakly-unanimous form. I will outline this using Spinoza’s doctrine of the universal faith (*fidei universalis*).

In Chapter 14, Spinoza sets out to re-establish faith as something entirely separate from philosophy. As Spinoza writes, ‘faith requires not so much true as pious dogmas, that is, such tenets as move the mind to obedience, even though many of these may not have a shadow of truth in them’ (14.8). Whereas philosophy is defined by ‘universal concepts’ whose aim is ‘nothing but truth’, guided by the dictates of reason, faith aims at nothing more than ‘obedience and piety’, and has its foundations in ‘histories and language’ (14.13). Indeed, throughout the previous chapter, Spinoza reiterates that the Bible ‘requires nothing

of men other than obedience' (13.3; cf. 14.3), an obedience which consists in loving one's neighbour, and acting justly, charitably and cooperatively. Thus when he presents the seven principles of a universal faith,¹⁰⁸ whose articles include precepts like an anthropomorphic, just and merciful being that Spinoza plainly refutes elsewhere (14.10, E1app), and iterates only their social expediency, one might easily deduce that the elitist reading, particularly the Strauss variant, has the most explanatory power.

To modern liberalism, or lovers of freedom generally, a term like obedience will seem abhorrent, and we must take care to grasp what Spinoza might mean by it, and from that, determine the limits of his account. It does not refer to totally passive obedience to sovereign powers, of a kind the elitist reading either endorses or fears for – at multiple points across the TTP, Spinoza warns against subjects being turned into 'slaves' (16.10, 17.6), or 'beasts and automata' (20.6). In such cases, their capabilities are intentionally underdeveloped and exploited by authorities to secure their own rule, but resulting in a weak, divided state. I argue instead that the obedience Spinoza describes is that of §1.6.2 and §3.2.2, an obedience to the common good or unanimity of the collective. Hence the universal faith's emphasis on good works alone, and its prescription that 'allows every person the greatest liberty to think' (14.13), and interpret scripture as they wish, so long as they do not harm others. In this is the potent antidote to Calvinist orthodoxy, with its emphasis on divine election and faith (as belief). The seven dogmas each supply imaginative means by which all can willingly obey the third political law of the common good. The use of such dogmas, like that of scripture, is its near-universal ability to teach obedience to the good of the collective, its unanimity, like that embodied in the social contract of the Hebrew

¹⁰⁸ The seven dogmas [*dogmata*]: there is a supreme being who is just and merciful; a singular being; omnipresent and omniscient; omnipotent; obedience consists solely in justice, charity, loving one's neighbour; by believing this one is saved; and this being forgives sins (TTP 14.10). Aside from the inferences of 'His' justice and forgiveness of sins, the remaining six are not inconsistent with substance monism and critique of anthropomorphism.

Republic. It is a 'path to salvation' available to all, beyond the 'very few ... who acquire the habit of virtue by the guidance of reason alone' (15.10), and who would already be socialised into such a belief-system in the first place before that guidance begins.

The exemplary reading reminds us to be sensitive to historical context: outlines of an elementary universal faith were a commonplace of Dutch Protestant humanism, and Grotius, Van Velthuysen, De Mey and others had presented similar principles for the purpose of clarifying Christian religious belief in order to extend its reach to other belief-systems.¹⁰⁹ On the face of Spinoza's own argumentation, he seems to be emulating a long tradition back to Maimonides of separating reason/philosophy from religion/faith. But I dispute this, and argue that Spinoza makes religion reasonable, and faith philosophical, by re-establishing it so that it produces socially reasonable, collectively empowering effects. Spinoza's early attempts to define natural reason and its correlation with divine law all attest to a strategy of making faith think, and devising imaginative strategies to enable a collective to live reasonably, without necessarily being trained to reason.

At the same time, his account of the universal faith suffers from a defect observable in the Hebrew Republic, and whose implications Spinoza does not seem to have heeded. While both belief-systems (Mosaic and universal) produce obedience to the common good as their effects, they supply no means for their agents to become more capable, reasonable and self-determining within their beliefs. Though not slaves, they remain children, held back by that 'childish understanding' Spinoza identified earlier. Against James and Balibar, there is very little empowering about their projection of popular sovereignty onto God – so long as they were entirely passive in this process and not active, their state remained somewhat

¹⁰⁹ On contemporary accounts of the universal faith, see James, 2012, 190-1, and Weststeijn, 2012, 29. I am not the first to treat the universal faith in Spinoza, but it tends to be commented on in passing rather than assessed in itself, and usually presented as a socially convenient religion of reason (e.g. Smith, 1997, 199-200, Israel, 2006, 158-9; Garber, 2008, 180-1). James, 2012, 205-12 is a welcome exception.

unanimous but weak, with few internal resources to tackle the development of superstition. An implication of 2p13 and 5p20s (cf. §2.5.2) is that the strength of an individual is relative to its internal proportion of adequate ideas or activity. This returns back to our comment on the nutritionist in §3.3: if the child is not enabled to freely desire what actually correlates to its own self-interest, then the effect is passivity and servitude, without any real empowerment whatsoever.

A less palatable axiom across the TTP is that the fickle *vulgus* is incapable of becoming reasonable. While Spinoza's account can explain how a very basic level of unanimity emerges through the social contract, it offers no further guidance for how a community becomes more powerful, that is to say, unanimous, except through a raft of intrinsically passive measures (e.g. obedience to a state religion, manipulating the passive affects of hope and fear). If it is not in re-organising a collective's imagination and affects to more joyous, empowering alternatives that are reasonable, and inclined to increasing self-determination and capability, then this burden must fall on the state, whose public religion must direct these effects with stringent and precise attention. Spinoza therefore needs a supplementary account of political institutions and constitutional forms to address how they might produce citizens that realise the common good. The TTP lacks this, and can only advocate freedom of speech, with the attendant problems of incapability noted earlier (§1.2.3, §3.4).

Thus Spinoza's cautious politics ends up endorsing an obedience that equates to unanimity, and offers an instance where unanimity was established for a time in the Hebrew Republic, through a collective imaginary. The Hebrew Republic *does* indicate how inadequate ideas, like those of the imagination and passive affects, can aid a disparate group of individuals in becoming freer – which is the third claim I wished to advance in this sectional trio. This becoming-freer requires that they combine their efforts into one body and mind as much as possible (following §3.2.2, and our unanimity hypothesis), and find means to

distribute these powers in a way that ensures as many are sovereign as possible. Yet producing community and commonality also involves a vast amount of imaginative, material and affective scaffolding, and many societies have relied on the visions of prophets and their followers, which enable a population to associate their desires and interests with the common good, and freely obey laws and instructions that realise it (following §3.3).

While the Hebrew Republic indicates much of how this can succeed, there is more in it which fails, from its uneven distribution of powers between church and state, which Spinoza sought to prove, to the structural defect we have identified wherein its population remained too passive and underdeveloped to actually realise their collective interest (after §3.4). Thus the common good diverged from the collective desire, and the key Premise 6 of our unanimity hypothesis was unrealised. While Spinoza's use of imagination is largely positive and non-elitist, it is far from exemplary, and its pessimism about the capabilities of the *vulgus* prevent it from recognising how they might be empowered to leave their servitude. Thus, in a final, important way, Spinoza does not make use of the insight that he attributes to Christ. If 'God sent his Christ to all nations, to free all men equally from the servitude of the [externally-imposed] law' (3.10), inscribing universally true principles 'deeply in their hearts' (4.10), then Christ's virtue is in the ability to make others think and act more adequately, that is to say, more freely and self-determinedly.¹¹⁰ An effective, unanimous polity will do the same – the Hebrew Republic does not. Despite these problems, in the final section I will attempt to reconstruct a positive theory of collectivity and the instrumental role of the imagination, and explain why a *populus* is more ontologically powerful, and socially reasonable, than a *vulgus*.

¹¹⁰ This criticism is indebted to DeBrabander, 2007, 106-7 whose highlighting of Christ's 'universalist project' and its 'rendering people autonomous' prompted my argument.

§3.6 Imagining Collectives

Our objective during this chapter has been to derive a theory of collectivity, and after establishing a metaphysical basis for this (§3.2), we began earnestly re-reading the TTP to identify conditions for unanimity and commonality. But soon into our study we encountered the same problem facing Spinoza, that most cannot – and seemingly *will* not – live according to the demanding dictates of reason. This may have brought to mind the turbulence of §1.2, where we identified the origins of political servitude in human affective vulnerability to unreasonable passions. Yet contra Hobbes, over §§3.3-4 we demonstrated how human beings are naturally disposed to associate with each other, even under the sway of sad passions like fear and hate, or vacillation. The Hebrew Republic under Moses provided an exemplar of that, an extraordinary state-religion that demanded absolute obedience. Spinoza's use of this exemplar is partly strategic for his audience, but troublingly indicates his own ambivalence, even preference, for authoritarian forms of producing collective imaginaries. While exploring the good reasons for this with our exemplary reading, we still concluded that it left far more to be desired, neither enabling the Hebrews to think for themselves, nor utilising any of the instrumental social reason that the imagination produces.

This still leaves incomplete our model for collectivity then. We concluded in §3.5 that Spinoza's own passive politics necessitated a supplementary account of constitutional forms and institutions that would produce a collective citizenry, directed to live reasonably, in the process becoming freer – a move that neatly explains the emergence of the TP, which I introduce in §4.2. But I wish to complete a thread of argumentation begun at the end of §1.5 regarding Spinoza's terminology for collectives, now drawing on our accounts of the imagination and social reason, as well as unanimity. To recap, our term table in §1.5 observed that the TTP makes a common distinction between *populus* and *vulgus*. We

defined *populus* as a collective group that has freely transferred its right to the sovereign who, in acting in their best interests, renders them sovereign too, a group that remains active in that transfer. *Plebs* by contrast referred to the common people in a passive sense, and with Balibar we agreed it is largely a socio-political category. *Vulgus* occurs more often, and refers to the common people under the sway of sad passions, destabilising the state, and incapable of reason.

Using our unanimity hypothesis, I wish to argue that these terms indicate the varying states of unanimity or collective power that communal groups share in. I will explore this claim with an interlocutor, Balibar, who has drawn on similar material to establish different claims. For Balibar, the originality of Spinoza's political theory lies in taking the 'mass' as its 'principal object of investigation' (1994, 5), with a particular concern for the 'fear of the masses', referring both to the fear they feel, and the fear they inspire in rulers. Balibar applies two concepts from *Ethics* to advance this: the free man exemplar, which, influenced by Strauss, he presents as a feature of Spinoza's esoteric rational elitism; and the psychotherapy of 5p10s, in which he claims Spinoza sought to 'neutralize' the passions (ibid., 7-8). While our definitions from §2.5 and §3.2 instead lead me to argue that Spinoza's exemplar is merely a model, and that his account of empowerment is one that utilises rather than neutralises joys in its maximising desires, Balibar does derive a perceptive politics of unanimity out of this. Noting uncontroversially that the greatest threat to a state is internal, Balibar uses the TP's concept of *multitudo* to assert a sub-physical politics of collective empowerment, a 'right of number', wherein popular powers coagulate into a 'combination, or rather, an interaction of forces' (15). Spinoza's ambivalence, Balibar rightly notes, is in his metaphysical commitment to 'mass liberation' (or *collective becoming-freer*, we would say) and his 'fear of the masses' (27), resulting in the warnings against the *vulgus* in TTP, and Spinoza's restrictive account of democracy in the TP.

Balibar's account of this ambivalence is perceptive, and he attempts to reconstruct it as a 'dialectic' (2008, 13), between an internal democratic politics led by a 'unanimous' multitude that is already reasonable (*ibid.*, 68-70), against an external elitist politics of state-religious obedience that 'indirectly' leads to freedom (48; cf. 88). This leads to one of the most sensitively-tuned reconstructions of Spinoza's politics in the critical literature, with a number of helpful additions to Spinoza's argumentation, such as that the state is a necessary means of 'internal transformation' and development of the multitude's capabilities (120), and that the effective integration of the multitude into the workings of the state is one of the preoccupations of the TP (cf. 95, 117, 123) – all claims we will largely agree with in the next Chapter. But this dialectic places a conflict in the text which reinforces the problems that neither the exemplary nor elitist reading could address, which is the activity and greater self-direction of individuals within a community. For aside from the methodological weaknesses of inferring a multitudinal politics across Spinoza's thought, it is clear that the *plebs*, *vulgus* and *multitudo* are far from unanimous – each form is totally passive and internally weak in a given polity, and *vulgus* particularly refers to a passivity which is determined to some sad passion by an external force, a collective servitude. The challenge for Spinoza (and one Balibar does appreciate) is that there is nothing intrinsically reasonable about the affects and desires of human beings, and so there is very little that is unanimous or reasonable in a given *demos*.

Balibar derives from Spinoza a politics of 'communication', one founded on human sociality and the free transmission of opinions as the basis of a state's good (98-9). By this broad term he captures not just conversational interactions, but the content of all inter-relational exchanges, be they imaginative, affective, economic or intellectual (124) – a '*relational ontology*' he calls it elsewhere (1997b, 7). From this he develops Simondon's concept of 'transindividuality', a collective being constituted out of immanent relations of activity and passivity (1997b, 15-32; cf. 1994, 27), relations constituted by this wide form of

communication. The term is a helpful one for conceiving Spinoza's interest in unanimity and collectivity, but to avoid confusion, I find §3.2.2's definition of collective individuals captures the same phenomena within a more expansive theory of individuation (the *trans-* is also superfluous, by our reading). Balibar infers an affirmative, liberatory potential in free tongues, our freedom of speech correlating to a 'multiplication of everyone's power' (2008, 118). Yet Spinoza's own argument for free speech is rooted in a more cautious response to Hobbes, that this inalienable faculty can only be censored to the detriment of the sovereign power, but which contains little reasonable in itself. Instead, the *populus* and *cives* reflect when a given collective is active, if not sovereign – and this activity reflects a capability which has been produced in them. Their activity and agency is an effect of their organised collective form – thus, responding to the communication thesis, we might say that free speech is only as good as the kind of polity it emerges from, but in itself is an instrumental good for relieving social tensions.

Balibar's dialectic places Spinoza's ontology of power (*intrinsic democracy*, we could simplify) against his political pessimism (*compelling obedience*), and seeks a new way to establish the former, at the expense of the insights of the latter. My argument finds no contradiction in them. Instead, our unanimity hypothesis directs us to argue that human beings are predisposed to forming collectives with others they judge of a common nature (§3.2.2). In spite of Spinoza's epistemic hierarchy in E2p40s, imagination is the most universal and elementary form of knowledge (§3.3), and thus these collectives are almost always established with the aid of the imagination in determining commonality with another. Compelling imaginings are needed and these do arise, but Spinoza's three laws of political reason and our arguments for instrumental truths/social reason (§3.4) do offer a standard by which some imaginings are superior to others. These are those that enable a collective to associate their desires-joys with what correlates to their actual self-preservation, being their common good, through rules and responsibilities that they will

freely choose to live by (§3.5). Even if it takes some time before many in a *populus* (for this is not a *vulgus*) acquire the common notions to recognise why these principles are worth living by (or how they can be changed if not), they can help establish and maintain a community that lives according to reason. The steps to reach this capability often require an organisation and distribution of powers, usually through a state-form, and a basic but compelling collective imaginary that ensures obedience to reason, first through the affects, leading to common notions, a ‘social ethos’ like James outlined earlier (§3.3).

If one lives in a very disorganised and divided state, where a population is terrorised by sad affects and unable to think for itself, then appealing to intellectual values, free speech or hoping for a better time-to-come is of little use. We can agree with Balibar that establishing or acquiring control of a state is in most cases necessary for collective empowerment. But government is not a means of neutralising mass passions or imposing reason on fearful, fear-provoking masses, but as a political form utilised by a collective that desires its own empowerment, and is guided by reasonable voices to associate its affects and desires with what actually correlates to its self-preservation. Instead, and consistent with the ethical freedom we reconstructed in §2.6, the lovers of freedom for whom Spinoza writes must do all they can to enable those around them to think for themselves, and live and desire as freely and self-determinedly as possible, all the while appreciating that this development in capabilities is long and difficult, and to be content with even modest successes.

§3.7 Conclusion

Among other pastimes like pipe-smoking and playing chess, Spinoza was fond of drawing (Nadler, 1999, 204, 263, 289). One of the figures seen in Spinoza’s sketchbook was a revolutionary fisherman, Masaniello, leader of a popular uprising against Spanish rule in Naples in 1647. The fisherman’s face bore an uncanny resemblance to Spinoza. Though

probably intended to amuse friends familiar with his reputation, it is also an apt motif to reflect on Spinoza's own intentions with the TTP, and his politics of unanimity more broadly. While Spinoza claimed his work was in conformity with Dutch censorship laws, and was partly inspired to write in Latin for this end, the work is conflicted between a desire to preserve the existing Dutch republican government, and a manifesto for political freedom more broadly. By the standards of anti-Socinian laws of the time, Spinoza's overt dismissal of miracles and naturalisation of biblical scripture was illegal, and if his intention sincerely was to avoid social instability, then by the TTP's standards he should not have published his work, as Garber argues (2008 185, noting Israel, 2001 as proof). Indeed by 1674 it was banned, by which time the liberal government of De Witt had collapsed and the Orangists and their Calvinist allies had seized power. Spinoza's Masaniello moment had failed to come off, and as we will outline in §4.2.1, the unanticipated collapse of this government and his previous faith in unreasonable free speech would force a number of revisions in his theory of collectivity and unanimity, that illuminate our arguments.

For while our doctrine of unanimity points to an exemplary collectivity that thinks and acts as one mind, guided by reason, no such polity has ever existed, and Spinoza's reasoning takes him back towards actually existing polities. Yet his thoughts about unanimity, reconstructed in this chapter as a hypothesis, and his inconvenient observations about the enabling powers of prophecy and imagination, both provide a firm political basis from which to understand *political power*, in a literal sense. They have also supplied us with a means for conceiving how individual agents form associations and become collective, and that such collectives vary in their individual power. If incomplete, Spinoza enables us to consider how a socially reasonable sense of commonality is produced in a collective, using imaginative and affective ideas and common notions. Such a commonality enables it to freely and collectively desire what correlates to its common good.

Rarely does this faculty emerge fully developed in an actual set of individuals. As analysed in this chapter, beyond an elementary propensity that brings communities together in an association of a narrowly-defined common nature, they require a good deal of prior capability to develop their collectivity, from the universal and necessary imaginative elements (e.g. language, customs) to common notions (e.g. citizenship, recognition and assent to the good of cooperation) to associate. Their collectivity is also weak if it is merely passively imposed by an authority onto a *vulgus*, rather than embodied by a sovereign *populus*, active, joyous, and internally directed, unlike the case of the Hebrews.

Here we have adjusted the terms in a slight but fundamental way: contra Spinoza, after the end of their first social contract, the Hebrews were not a *populus* by our additional criterion of a collective determining its own desires and common good as adequately as possible. While Balibar's concept of communication is an invaluable means of conceiving relationality (as is relational autonomy), we have discovered in this chapter that powerful collectives are not merely to be understood by 'right of number'. Rather, they are more powerful to the extent that they are composed of a greater proportion of parts acting adequately, reasonably and joyously – and this internal quality of an agent is key. In this way, the elementary unanimity and desire for becoming-collective that is foundational to becoming freer is realised. Our freedom is in increasing the quality of our relations, in becoming-multiple, becoming-common, becoming-universal, in this order and under the umbrella of collectivity. Balibar's communication thesis neatly illustrates how, in a rational collective, its constitutive parts reflect and rearrange their own affects to correlate with the collective's power, so that one individual's pride and ambition are re-programmed into sad undesirable affects, and another's despair and fear are re-programmed into indignation and hope through solidarity.

Though we should avoid imagining the state as a collective individual, Spinoza still leaves a great deal of room to explore how – as a wider porous circle containing smaller defined circles of collective identities – the state must be used to realise the elementary conditions that enable a *vulgus* to become a capable *populus* (or turn a *multitudo* into *cives*, in the next chapter). We have also argued in this chapter that establishing capability is fundamental to collectivity, and we presented this problem to Balibar. There is nothing intrinsically rational about the desires of human beings. Instead, we have observed that the imagination, being the most universal form of knowledge we share in, has been used to achieve instrumentally reasonable effects in producing commonality of a cooperative, joyous sort. As this order of individuation extends up to the entirety of nature, we can think back to our ontology of power/freedom and observe that collective individuality is an emergent property of a given organisation of power. One could say it is constituted by the realisation of that power.

I make this inference because it neatly links our analysis to more recent philosophical work on collective intentionality. M. Gilbert describes how a walking-group becomes a plural subject in being ‘jointly committed to doing something as a body’ (2006, 145), a commitment that involves a degree of normative obligation to fulfil one’s duties as a member of the group. Such a joint commitment requires a prior willingness, mutual understanding and capability, and Gilbert derives from joint commitment a theory of political obligation. Pettit proceeds from different epistemic bases but arrives at a similar position. For Pettit, group agency requires a ‘minimum of rationality’ (2001, 241). A group becomes a singular collective agent through identifying common goals, developing a ‘body of judgements for rationally guiding action’ in support of these goals, and then identifying who on occasion should pursue these goals (Pettit and Schweikard, 2006, 33). Building on this existing research, Lawford-Smith derives a politics of coordinating individual obligations and ‘mutual responsiveness’ (2015, 227-32), and Schmid argues that ‘plural identity’ is realised by

habitual communal dispositions within members, enabling them to act together in joint evaluations – a ‘plural pre-reflective self-awareness’, or sense of ‘us’ (2014, 9-12).

Our analysis can now confidently define this as a problem of *capability*, and such capability requires prior establishment by the community in which an individual is socialised, as the Hebrew Republic indicated. Our account is therefore able to explain both the conditions for collective actions and how they emerge through shared desires, without having to load too much explanatory burden on a voluntarist agency and choice, as Gilbert, Lawford-Smith and Schmid do. Though collective intentionality is usually applied to small defined groups or communities, we can revise Pettit’s formulation with our concept of social reason, to explain that even without the rational deliberation of every member of a given collective in every decision, their actions are suffused with an instrumental rationality, correlating their collective desire with the common good. To this problem of collective coordination, we have now provided an argument for why the imagination bears a major internal responsibility in collectivity. In the next chapter we will address the external element for establishing such coordination, the state.

Chapter 4. Reason's Republic

§4.1 Introduction

While Spinoza remained resolute in his belief in the freedom of the human mind, there is an ambivalence across his works as to how achievable its common realisation might be. Can individuals by their own resources acquire such power, living freely and joyously according to reason, or does the locus of change lie in their community or state? In Chapter 1 we introduced this through the problem of political servitude in the TTP. While finding its basis in the manipulation of a general, natural affective susceptibility to sad passions, exacerbating a predisposition to conflict, we also determined enough about natural right, the laws of political reason and the nature of power to identify a route towards freedom. Chapter 2 used the *Ethics* to assemble an argument for becoming freer that was rooted in human desire, our means of ethical development. We defined freedom as a form of self-caused activity, and using a degrees model of empowerment, focused on a relative becoming-freer as something meaningful and attainable (§§2.2-4). We noted the priority of social life to this becoming freer, in terms of a frequency and quality of relations with others, and identified how agents become more powerful in re-programming the affects that give rise to their desires, doing what they can to associate ideas and activities that correlate to actual self-preservation. In this way, freedom became a collective way of life (§2.6.5).

Chapter 3 then presented a theory of collectivity, accounting for how human beings form collective groups, their individuation and relative internal degrees of power, and why collectives are intrinsically more powerful than acting alone. We constructed a unanimity hypothesis to this end (§3.2), and explored how the imagination plays a universal and socially instrumental role in producing collective identities, from beliefs and customs that bring

together a given group, to a set of ideas around commonality that allow members to identify each other and cooperate. Prophecy is unrivalled as a medium of collective imagination (§3.3), and its example under Moses presented the paradox of something epistemically unreasonable but socially, instrumentally true, in how it correlated the Hebrews' collective desire to their common good (§3.4). But its basis in inadequate ideas and attachment to superstitions and sad passions makes it socially unreliable. While assessing Spinoza's good reasons for ambivalence here, we concluded that his banishment of anything related to prophecy left him with little counter-resources in the imagination to challenge the growing influence of his Calvinist enemies (§3.7) or construct a new republican imaginary.

In evaluating the exemplar of the Hebrew Republic, and Spinoza's universal faith, we began to trace how the state was being increasingly loaded with the responsibility of making its *populus* become freer. This chapter pursues the trajectory of that development. Produced conjecturally over 1674-7, Spinoza's final and mostly-complete *Tractatus Politicus* presents a model of collective power as realised through the unanimity of the state. The work is remarkable in its unstated axiom that human beings can become freer and more reasonable without their awareness, through political institutions and models that determine them to think and act reasonably. In §4.2 I present the development of this under-appreciated late work, and assess its shift of focus to the state. I then account for Spinoza's expansion of natural right to include independence of thought (§4.3), and assess his attempts to make ideal states, as collective individuals, think reasonably. This *making* of citizens out of multitudes is then identified in §4.4. Referring back to our model of maximal desires-joys (§2.6.4), I explore how Spinoza relies on an exemplar of the human individual to present how the *ideal state*, as a collective individual, thinks, acts, lives and desires reasonably. I then identify a second axiom of collective right which determines the pre-eminence of popular sovereignty in Spinoza's three political forms (§4.5). I challenge three prevailing readings of Spinoza's late politics (pro-democracy, pro-aristocracy and pro-liberal), and affirm my own

politics of collective desire. In the conclusion, I repeat a criticism first presented in §3.7, that in loading agency onto the state (rather than a community, or state-religion, as in the TTP), Spinoza's model still cannot explain how citizens become freer and more reasonable, that is, think reasonably for themselves.

§4.2 Freedom is the State

That the TP begins with the word 'Affectus', and ends with the expulsion of women from an idealised democracy, makes it something of an anomaly both within Spinoza's thought and in its relation to early modern neighbours like Hobbes and Locke. As an incomplete work there is a methodological limitation in inferring too heavily from thoughts Spinoza may have wished to revise or abandon, but taken in itself, it presents a number of arguments about political power that are logically derived from *Ethics* and TTP while travelling in a new direction. In this section I will give some context to the TP, as unlike its sibling works it has suffered from being overlooked or conflated with the TTP (§4.2.1),¹¹¹ and an understanding of its context is fundamental for appreciating why Spinoza's ideas about collectivity transform in his final years. Whereas the Hobbesian influence of the TTP is well accounted for, the influence of Aristotle and Machiavelli on Spinoza's politics is less documented, and as profound, I will argue (§4.2.2). In doing so, I will link together some underdeveloped insights in the TTP regarding the political state, and reconstruct how these problematic ideas develop into a coherent theory that freedom is only possible in a political state, a position Spinoza raises in his final work, and one which we will explore with him and challenge over the chapter (§4.2.3).

¹¹¹ Readings I consider to insufficiently distinguish between the politics of the TTP and TP include Den Uyl, 1983, 19, Matheron, 1988, 295-6, Gatens and Lloyd, 1999, 114-25, Israel, 2001, 261-2, Balibar, 2008, 118, and James, 2011, 187-188. In §4.5.2 I evaluate a selection of these readings, but it should be clear that the concern of this chapter is with evaluating Spinoza's politics of collectivity, rather than the strengths of its interpretations.

§4.2.1 *Rampjaar*

While the worsening political circumstances of the early 1670s may have inspired Spinoza to revise the TTP's prescriptions, it was probably from 1674-5 onwards that he began work on a specifically *Political Treatise*. Following the subterfuges in publishing the anonymous TTP in 1670 (cf. Israel, 2001, ch. 16), Spinoza at first managed to avoid identification as its author, and returned to completing his *Ethics*. He was still anxious for his safety, as well as for the reputation of the TTP. In February 1671 he writes to his close friend Jelles, asking him to do everything he could to prevent the circulation of a Dutch translation of the work (Ep 44). In the same letter, he speculates about the need for a new political work that would treat of the 'highest good' of the state, beyond the empty pursuit of 'wealth and honours', but his later preoccupation with completing *Ethics* and revising the TTP postpones this plan, like many other of Spinoza's great, unfinished projects. In July 1675 Spinoza visits Amsterdam to oversee the publication of his masterpiece, *Ethics*, a work he had begun around thirteen years earlier, but after being warned of a danger to his life should the 'blasphemous' book enter print, he obeys *caute* and postpones printing for fear of repression and arrest (Ep 68).¹¹² The insecurity of his situation, like that of his country, may have weighed heavily on him thereafter.

The maritime republican government under Grand Pensionary Johan de Witt had been endangered by naval rivalry with England since the 1650s, though its alliance with Spain against France in 1668 earned the wrath of its southern neighbour. A spectacular coordinated attack in 1672 by France, England, Munster and Cologne overran its borders and overwhelmed its forces. The Dutch later called 1672 *Rampjaar*, 'Disaster Year' (Israel, 1995, 795-800). Though no prescription of the TTP could have aided the Dutch militarily

¹¹² Spinoza's motto was *caute* (caution), which he had inscribed on a ring, according to legend – I can find no original source validating it, and it does not appear in the *Opera* or Lucas, Colerus or Bayle. See Nadler, 1999, 244.

against such odds, they might have saved de Witt and his supporters who, in the ensuing military collapse, were purged from power by the supporters of Prince William III of Orange. Though the uneven division of political influence between the pro-Orangist Calvinist church and the liberal state had played its part in their downfall, Spinoza had given no account of the United Provinces' fatally compromised, mixed political form. Bereft of powerful allies or political patronage, Spinoza's appeal for democratic toleration had been undermined by the tolerated and free members of the United Provinces, who now embraced more draconian religious controls and the restoration of monarchical government. Worse, the TTP had become a *succès de scandale*, with authorities rushing to raid bookshops and ban the work shortly after its sale, and Spinoza was openly identified as its author by 1671-2 (Israel, 2010, 76-85). Spinoza had lost one friend to political repression (Adriaan Koerbagh, 1669), and between the murder of De Witt in 1672 and the execution of his elderly friend and teacher Van den Enden for treason in France in 1674, Spinoza had sufficient grounds to question his safety. His correspondence indicates an increased suspicion of the motives of others, an astute suspicion, be it the offer of the chair of Philosophy at Heidelberg University (Ep 48), or Leibniz's wish to read the *Ethics* (Ep 72), both refused. Spinoza's world had become a more dangerous place since the TTP.

§4.2.2 The Highest Good

Remarkably, this vulnerability leads Spinoza to question the very basis not just of his own state, but of all others. For there is more in Spinoza's context to explain why he would rather abandon such risky political work than pursue it. It is the companionship of his ideas that compels him. A series of internal deficiencies in his politics are revealed not just by his context but in his growing frustrations with Hobbes (cf. Ep 50, TTP annotation 33). With internal reform no longer viable, Spinoza begins writing a *Political Treatise* with the even more ambitious intention of superseding Grotius and Oldenbarnevelt in proposing a more

reasonable political constitution for the Dutch nation, one founded on the intrinsic rationality of a large, competent deliberative assembly and a less 'defective constitution' (TP 9.14), presumably rid of the House of Orange. Where the TTP had critically applied reason to religion, Spinoza now applied reason to the form and method of politics. Using the same elementary basis of the common good as the security of the state, Spinoza now turned his focus to how such a good could be politically realised.

Spinoza began to study the politics of Aristotle and Machiavelli directly, and the influence of these two on his politics is immense. It is reflected in its form and content, with a new teleological interest in the highest good of politics, being in the *inviolability* of a state and its citizens (TP title-page). His final extant letter to an unnamed friend, written in mid-1676, informs him of work completed on the TP, begun 'some time ago at your suggestion'. Spinoza had completed six chapters so far, and stated his intention to treat the 'ultimate and highest aim society can contemplate' (Ep 84) in a new political work. It is a peculiarly teleological object, and inconsistent with his earlier critique of purposiveness (cf. §2.5.1), unless we grasp the profound, underlying and consistent significance of exemplars across all his work, devices for educating our imaginations to what might be possible, and what might therefore be accomplished.¹¹³ Though Spinoza acknowledges his friend's request for a *Political Treatise*, it is likely that Spinoza needed no encouragement. This new political work commences not with prophets or substance but natural right or desire, and from there to sovereign powers, being in practice a collectively-shared, unanimous right, before moving

¹¹³ There is *Ethics*' free man (§3.2.1), and the Hebrew state in the TTP (§3.4); Spinoza refers to God as an 'exemplar of the true life' in TTP 13.8, 14.10-11, and the early KV (2.6) encourages us to imagine a 'perfect man' to emulate. The orientation towards the mind's freedom in TIE 11 is provided by a 'true good' functioning as a 'guiding principle'. A systematic treatment of exemplars, imaginative projection and emulation in Spinoza awaits completion.

onto the classic trio of political models: monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy (*populare imperium*).¹¹⁴

In seeking to address both the highest end of a political organisation, as well as its three manifestations, Spinoza was following Aquinas, Machiavelli, Grotius and Hobbes in using Aristotle's *Politics* as a theoretical base from which to think through and beyond. Aristotle's *Politics* combined teleological optimism with scientific naturalism to describe the civil state (*polis*) as the highest aim and 'most sovereign of all goods' towards which human associations look (1992, 1252a1). He considered the human as a distinctly 'political animal', able through speech to indicate what is useful, just and good, and naturally driven to seek 'the *good life*' made possible through the state (1252b27). Political organisation is understood as the highest ideal of human achievement. Aristotle also considered that 'all possible forms of [political] organization have now been discovered' (1264a1), and could be summarised as either monarchy, aristocracy, or 'polity', defined as '[p]olitical control exercised by the mass of the populace in the common interest' (1279a32). Unlike a democracy, disparaged as being the rule by the poor alone, the benefit of a polity is that they enable the highest possible number 'to reach a high standard in all forms of virtue'. Their social institutions were already sufficiently balanced to enable the majority of society to achieve the conditions of virtue that best provide for the 'common good' (1278b6-1279a16). Polity therefore provides for *eudaimonia* on a collective scale by way of the common good. Such a polity has its foundations in reason, and can be discerned like any other natural phenomena. It is also a *koinonia* – a 'community' or 'association' defined by its common purpose (e.g. 1280b29). This last facet may be most relevant: Spinoza's direction takes him away from the self-interested individualism of the De la Courts and Hobbes that

¹¹⁴ It would be tempting to claim that Spinoza places *populare imperium* into the heart of all three political forms – and such a claim would support the '*immanent cause*' pro-democracy arguments evaluated later in §4.5.2. However the term was a common equivalence of *democratia* (see Van Bunge et al., 2011, 192).

placed far more emphasis on *contract* than *social*, and towards a politics not just of sociality (like Grotius) but collective right.¹¹⁵

While the TP remains preoccupied with identifying this highest good in political societies, the first chapter bears the influence of another major political theorist, Machiavelli. While also a naturalist, Machiavelli's view of human nature is profoundly pessimistic ('all men are evil': 2003, I.3, 28), and his faith in wisely-organised political institutions is of a paternalistic sort, saving both princes and peoples from their worst impulses (cf. 2005, chs. 3-4). The result is somewhat contradictory: while attuned to the best that an optimum society can achieve, Spinoza echoes Machiavelli in denouncing other philosophers whose politics have been based on 'human nature that nowhere exists', and which 'conceive men not as they are, but as they would like them to be' (TP 1.1). The 'utopias' of philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, More and Bacon are dismissed in favour of a new empirical methodology, following the lessons of 'statesmen' who, guided by experience (and Spinoza implies Machiavelli and Pieter De la Court), will aid him 'to demonstrate by sure and conclusive reasoning such things as are in closest agreement with practice, deducing them from human nature as it really is' (ibid. 1.2-4). Politics is no longer concealed beneath biblical analysis but is presented as a science. Just as in the *Ethics* Spinoza considered human nature as if it were 'of lines, planes or bodies' (E3pref), here the affects are a 'branch of knowledge' that can be scientifically understood with the same 'unfettered spirit' of mathematics, so that one can regard 'love, hatred, anger, envy, pride, pity, and other agitations in the same way as heat, cold, storm, thunder, and such pertain to the atmosphere' (TP 1.4).

¹¹⁵ By *collective right* I mean the natural rights or desires of a given group that is pooled into one union or collective. Spinoza's use of *pactum* gives this the fixture of an agreement in the TTP, but in TP it is more often realised through a continual reasonable participation in civic forms (e.g. councils).

This model is inspired by Polybius' understanding of society as an equilibrium of forces, an important precursor for Machiavelli (cf. 2003, III.11, 286), whose models of checks, safeguards, and defusing inevitable social conflicts influence Spinoza. In thinking beyond classic political theory Spinoza and others each had to think through it, particularly via the lessons of 'practice' that proceed from a fundamentally disharmonious view of societies. Whereas Aristotle, Cicero, and Polybius considered political forms as acting naturally towards the teleological good of civil harmony, events in early modern Europe presented Spinoza and others with case-studies in why societies naturally drift towards a greater evil if not sufficiently constituted and attentive to popular support.¹¹⁶ Yet whereas Machiavelli dismisses utopias to advise would-be princes to 'learn how not to be good' (2005, XV, 53), Spinoza takes a separate route, arguing that a well-organised and reasonable state requires no such expedient vices (TP 5.2). What differentiates Spinoza's TP from its peers is its attempt to derive a political naturalism from its own earlier definitions of reason, affects and natural right. Leaving nothing to *fortuna* or the moods of the monarch, Spinoza's rational republic places a commonly-recognised principle of popular sovereignty (cf. Hobbes, 1998b, XII.8; Machiavelli, 2005, IX, 36) into the very life of political processes.

§4.2.3 The Purpose of the State

A third and final formative development I wish to identify in the TP is its prioritisation of the state as the basis of ethical and political freedom. Spinoza's new confidence in the political institutions of government and law is striking when compared to the *Ethics*, yet without a sensitive appreciation of his ontology of power, this confidence can be misunderstood as an apology for authority. Certainly elements of his own argumentation in TTP suggested a need for a supplementary account of political institutions (§3.5). Though democracy was found to

¹¹⁶ My emphasis on Aristotle comes at the expense of a more influential, prevailing reading of a 'neo-Roman' revival in early modern republicanism (most prominently by Skinner, 1997), relying heavily on Machiavelli. Its relevance to Spinoza has been drawn (without the Florentine) by James, 2009a, 226-8, and 2012, 235-7.

be the most natural form, its existence was now something else belonging to a 'poet's golden age', and in removing reasonable agency from the *vulgus* and casting out the prophets, Spinoza's politics needed a new agent to produce reasonable (that is, cooperative) behaviours (§3.7).

Towards the end of the TTP some of these implications emerge. In an argument that Steinberg dedicates a compelling analysis to and terms 'passage P' (2009, 36; TTP 20.6), Spinoza treats the very same 'ultimate purpose' and 'aim' of the state. He locates it in a freedom of an affective kind ('to free everyone from fear'), a social kind ('to act without harm to themselves or to others') and a cognitive kind ('to allow their minds and bodies to develop in their own ways in security and enjoy the free use of reason'). Spinoza concludes that 'the true purpose of the state is in fact freedom'. It achieves this in two ways. Firstly, it provides a minimal level of security, being the elementary result of the social contract, protecting a community of human beings through their pooling of their natural right into a collective form that protects them all (cf. TTP 3.20). Secondly, and following deductively, its institutions can be used to help nurture and realise the intrinsic capabilities of the people, developing their powers of reasoning in a peaceful, publicly-spirited and cooperative polity (cf. the paternalism of TTP 16.10, and our collectivist argument of §3.2.1).

Using passage P, Steinberg challenges what he identifies as a prevailing 'liberal' reading of Spinoza's political good, one concerned with protecting individual liberties rather than affirming a normative conception of the social good (2009, 35). Though his argument is derived from different source material, it correlates with ours in affirming that freedom is of a general kind across Spinoza's works, and that there is no substantial difference between ethical and political freedom, only the means used to realise it (*ibid.*, 39; cf. Kisner, 2011, 9). Where we differ is our interest in how this is achieved. Since §2.6.5 I have argued for the fundamentality of collectivity in Spinoza's vision of becoming freer, but I have also

challenged Spinoza with some of my own claims, for instance freely accepting necessity (§2.6.2) and willful desire (§2.6.3), and criticised him in the last chapter (§3.7) for failing to include collective self-determination in his model of civic freedom. Steinberg largely follows Spinoza in loading the burden of becoming-freer onto the state. 'A state that is able to procure the *securitas* [an affect of certain hope or peace of mind] of its members will in turn have empowered or liberated them, since it will consequently promote their joy or psychic wellbeing in a reliable way' (2009, 52), he claims. Alongside producing a minimal security, he also identifies its liberatory power using an 'inflationary' account wherein the state increases the power of acting of its citizens, through the stability of its institutions that in turn determine 'as-if' reasonable behaviours, and in providing a general environment of hope, where citizens can flourish (2009, 46-8). This is an exemplary reading on the whole, and we will return to it in our evaluations later, but at this stage in our argument we can note that for Spinoza's inference of freedom as political to stand up, it must supply a model of how its citizens can actually become more reasonable, rather than merely live under reasonable rule, which is all Steinberg's reading ultimately provides.

While on the face of it the 'freedom' of the state, and of the individual, seem to be of very different orders, by applying Spinoza's own ontology of power (§2.3.2), and its equivalence with reason, we can also identify that in both cases, each's freedom is an accomplishment of an internal equilibrium of its parts, and an external disposition to desire and act in ways that correlate to its actual self-preservation (§2.6.1). This is partly then a question of constitution, of being composed of a greater amount of adequate ideas and active, self-determining parts to those that are inadequate and passive, that therefore enable the individual (corporeal or civil) to be as much an active cause of its own effects as possible. However, whereas these arguments also found freedom to reflect a degree of self-determination or adequacy, a capability and responsibility enabled by one's relations with

others, the TP shifts its attention to how the state can *determine* such conditions in its citizens.

We assess this process in §4.3, but its emergence seems to follow from an application of *Ethics*' own account of the affects and desire. The overcoming of our servitude to harmful ideas (§1.2) necessitates using reasonable ideas and joyous affects to challenge their power and become more self-determining (or adequate) of our behaviour (§2.4), and we presented a dynamic model of how joyous affects, aided by common notions, can steer the individual to overcome their fear through the greater good secured by cooperation, friendship and peace (§2.5.2). In a not dissimilar way, it is my claim in this sub-section that Spinoza applies the same method to political states. Thinking of what I earlier termed the 'environment' of affects, imaginings and ideas that determine a specific consciousness of desire (§2.5.1), in the TP Spinoza explores how constitutional forms, institutions and distributions of power can determine political unanimity, one that is necessarily reasonable (§3.2). Recalling the TTP's account of prophecy (§3.4), what matters is not the content of these given imaginings but the instrumental good they achieve. Thus the TP claims that, for the state to survive, its 'government must be so organised that its ministers cannot be induced to betray their trust or to act basely, whether they are guided by reason or by passion' (TP 1.6). Note that whether they do or not is a consequence of the organisation of their governmental form. Spinoza adds that it 'does not matter ... what motives induce men to administer its affairs properly', so long as this instrumental good is achieved. 'Freedom of spirit or strength of mind', *Ethics*' highest virtues, become 'the virtue of the private citizen: the virtue of a state is its security'.

There are two features of this utterance that will help conclude our discussion. Firstly, it continues a line of argument first developed in the TTP wherein a political form is necessary for a minimal unanimity to emerge and remain in existence, through security and

mutual assistance – our claim in §3.4 regarding the social contract. Secondly, it separates off the state as a specific subject for scientific analysis. We may recall from E4df8 that virtue is equivalent to freedom or power – Spinoza reminds us again at TP 2.7 in any case, while summarising the *Ethics*' account of conatus and desire. The state's virtue or power is in its ability to persevere in existence, withstanding forces externally and internally that will otherwise compel the proportionate ratio of its parts into dissolution and war. Its instrumental reason is in preserving itself, like any individual, and in this its highest good or reason lies. To accomplish this, it need not rely on the virtues or vices of a few instrumental figures within it – rather, its reason is realised through the collective citizen body.

Hence Spinoza notes of 'that keen observer' Machiavelli that 'he is well known to be an advocate of freedom, and he has given some very sound advice as to how it should be safeguarded' (TP 5.7). But the principles which Spinoza derives from Machiavelli concern the immanent, intrinsic power of the collective, the sum of those individuals who invest their desire or right into the state. This active power is the security of the state, and is its unanimity or collective reason. Thus against those readers who claim that the TP renders might equal to right, or does too little to prevent this conclusion (Strauss, 1982, 18; Den Uyl, 1983, 7-13; Curley, 1996, 315), the highest good of the state is the freedom or power of its active participants. This explains the procedural detail later given in each constitutional form to government apparatuses that express popular representation, justice, and devices to avoid corruption. In turn, this attests to the profound importance of the politically-organised state in the TP, which in whatever form it takes is not simply a government that manages or distributes power, but rather creates it and adequately realises it through binding institutions like 'a common code of law' (TP 1.3) through which the state *lives*.

§4.3 Collective Thought

A limitation of the unanimity hypothesis of §3.2.2 was its underdeveloped nature in the text, and I noted that the TP provides a full and focused exposition of what was previously implied in other doctrines. In this section I will substantiate that claim, while using it to advance why Spinoza argues that reason can be a property belonging to collective individuals, like a state. While his password for unanimity in the TP, *una veluti mente* (as if by one mind),¹¹⁷ has led to readings of a collective conatus (Matheron, 1997, 217; Bove, 1996, 257) or ‘consensus’ under the sovereign will (Deleuze, 1988, 266-267; Malcolm, 2002, 49), I will instead argue that it refers to reason, and that thinking reasonably is unanimously, by one common mind.

To establish this claim, I will first identify how Spinoza expands on his definitions of natural right and its relation to reason in TP Chapter 2, and why this new basis enables him to offer a concept of reasonable collective unanimity. Having outlined his conatus doctrine once again, and re-formulating definition d_2 (§2.4) of evil’s relativity to the empowerment of a person’s specific nature (TP 2.8), Spinoza appends a new claim that correlates human power with independence of thought. Spinoza gives four instances where one person falls under the authority of another (*sub potestate habere*) either in body or mind (2.10), and to the extent that one is deceived by another, one is subject to their right (2.11). By implication, ‘it follows that the mind is fully in control of itself only to the extent that it can use reason aright’. Neither afraid nor deceived, it can think for itself, and ‘since human power should be assessed by strength of mind [*fortitudine*] rather than robustness of body, it follows that those in whom reason is most powerful and who are most guided thereby are most fully in control of their own right’. The argument is made quickly and in the manner of a recap, but actually Spinoza expands his theory of power to explicitly involve a greater degree of independence and self-control. In order for a person (or people) to possess their own right

¹¹⁷ Variants of the term appear at TP 2.13, 2.15-16, 2.21, 3.2, 3.5, 3.7, 6.1, and 8.6.

(*sui juris*),¹¹⁸ they require a relative power of self-determination to withstand the rights of others who might otherwise seek to exploit them. In concise fashion, Spinoza offers a new foundation with which to tackle the problem of political servitude, through independence of mind.

From this, Spinoza continues to present his old arguments for collectivity ('if two men come together...': 2.13; cf. §3.2.1, E4p18s) and mutual assistance (2.15), in remarkably quick fashion. From mutual assistance he derives the necessity of acting together – 'the greater the number who come together as one [*plures in unum sic conveniunt*], the more right they will all collectively possess' (ibid.) – and arrives at his first formulation of unanimity. In holding their rights in common, 'all are guided, as it were, by one mind' (2.16), and this collective power is greater than the sum of its parts, being the basis of sovereign power (2.17). Responsibility for its discharge can either fall under an aristocracy, monarchy or democracy, for its underlying principle of a collective investment of natural right, and the good of its unanimity, is the same. This unanimity is impossible however unless the state's laws are 'prescribed by reason' (2.21), and it is in this way that Spinoza's civil state is one guided by reason, rather than coercive conformity (cf. 5.4, which makes this clearer). What this reason amounts to is the common good, the freedom that all can collectively share in and benefit from. Thus Spinoza writes that 'the state must necessarily be so established that all men ... will do what is in the interests of their common welfare' (6.3). Yet once again it does not matter if this is done willingly, reasonably or not, so long as their common good is realised – 'either voluntarily or constrained by force and necessity, they will all live as reason prescribes'. Spinoza relies on the same Ciceronian law of the common good introduced in §1.4 and returned to in §3.6. The 'people's welfare' (*salus populi*) is said to be the 'highest

¹¹⁸ *Sui juris* (with right) was derived from Roman and Greek sources popular in Dutch republicanism: Aristotle limits citizenship to those deemed 'self-sufficient' (1992, 1275b13), whereas Justinian's *Digest* defines the slave as one subject to the power of another, as opposed to the free and self-willing agent (James, 2009a, 226); cf. Den Uyl, 1983, 18, Kisner, 2011, 21, Weststeijn, 2012, 162.

law or the king's supreme right' in a monarchy (7.5), and it is an elementary standard of the strength of any given polity in the TP.¹¹⁹

I will now round up some of these claims. Spinoza has argued that political freedom now lies in self-determination of thought, and that reason directs us to associate with others into collectives. Despite his initial protests about treating societies 'as they are', the kinds of states he then considers are those that fall under his 'highest aim' of any given society, which is freedom. Thus the freest societies are those that think according to 'one mind', a claim that we have clarified as meaning according to universal reason. To live according to one mind, or reasonably, requires living in a state with reasonable laws, being those that actualise the common good of all its members, enabling all to pursue desires that resulted in shared joys, mutual empowerment, and which correlate to self-preservation. While the actual governmental form of societies will differ, the virtue of any state is in its security, and this is determined by how well it realises the common good of its members. There is no confusion then when Spinoza remarks that 'the right of a commonwealth [*civitatis jus*] is determined by the power of a multitude [*potentia multitudinis*] that is guided as though by a single mind [*una veluti mente ducitur*]' (TP 3.7).¹²⁰ This multitude, a formless number of persons whose rights are pooled collectively into the state, becomes unanimous when its political form determines them to act reasonably, willingly or not. This acting reasonably, or what Steinberg earlier termed 'as-if' reasonably, is not a sinister device of servitude, but a concise shorthand for the common good. In this way we can appreciate the meaning of the second part of this remark: 'this union of minds could in no way be conceived unless the chief aim of the commonwealth is identical with that which sound reason teaches us is for the good of all men'.

¹¹⁹ Cf. TP 3.17, 4.6, 5.7, 6.3, 6.8, 7.3-5, 8.20, 8.44; Hobbes, 1998a, XXX.1.

¹²⁰ I follow most translators in rendering *civitas* as commonwealth. §4.4 explores the shift in terminology since the TTP.

To achieve this standard of unanimity, Spinoza makes three departures from his earlier argumentation in the TTP and *Ethics*. Condensed, he abandons *a)* the public utility of religion, *b)* the socially instrumental use of the imagination, and *c)* civil freedom of judgement. In this final part of the section, I explore why he does this, and what problems it causes for the kinds of political freedom assessed in the last chapter. The first casualty, religion, is not an altogether surprising one, though elements of the universal faith are retained. Early in the text, Spinoza departs from previous arguments by noting that while ‘all are convinced that religion ... teaches that each should love his neighbour’, a tenet of the TTP, in practice ‘this conviction is of little avail against the passions’ (1.5). Instead, while elements of private religion are tolerated though placed under strict control (e.g. 6.40, 8.46), he separates ‘core virtues’ like ‘charity towards one’s neighbour’ and ‘to safeguard peace and promote harmony’ as values of the state which must be promulgated by the sovereign power, and left under their control (3.10). There is but brief mention of superstition, and Spinoza’s interest in removing religion is to prevent an internal division of sovereignty, or a hindrance on the ability of sovereign powers to think freely. Instead, Spinoza outlines a ‘national religion’ in his discussion of aristocracy (8.46), one which functions as a transmitter of civic values and power, representing the sovereignty of the commonwealth. While Spinoza refers back to the universal faith of TTP 14, it is unclear given its lack of presence elsewhere if this public religion would have been included in the final work.

Spinoza’s banishment of imagination *b)* also marks a departure from the TTP, and presents an interpretative challenge to arguments for a liberatory politics of the imagination across Spinoza’s work (e.g. Gatens, 2009a; James, 2010; cf. §3.3). Given that the TP is proposing a political science of state power, with its general basis in popular sovereignty, it may not be too surprising that a collective freedom of mind necessitates banishing all religion and inadequate forms of knowledge from playing an instrumental social role. Being inadequate and partial, such knowledge is often likely to predispose us to conflict and

disagreement, whereas Spinoza's concern is with establishing common ground through universal reason. Some state institutions like clans (6.10, 8.14), councils (6.15-25, 8.3-6), and a minimal public religion take over the functions of producing collective identifications, but it is remarkable how no account is given to the education of subjects. Whereas even Hobbes attributed some virtue to the education of citizens, considering them 'clean paper' (1998a, XXX.6) to be inscribed with civic values, Spinoza rests faith in the intrinsic rationality of assemblies. Though Spinoza's metaphysics lend him to unanimity and collective power, his model inadvertently better serves a more individualistic, liberal nationalism, and in this respect his conclusions anticipate nascent trends in European states, post-Treaty of Westphalia. We will comment on the socialisation of citizens in the next section.

It is the final departure *c)* from freedom of civic judgement which indicates the most forthright and contentious element of unanimity. To think as if by one mind involves some strict restrictions against those who might deviate from what is reasonable, including that of deciding for themselves 'what is fair or unfair ... righteous or unrighteous' (3.5). The TP makes a number of prohibitions against individuals challenging the collective's laws and beliefs. While these are, like the TTP's attacks on theological sedition, concerned with the stability of the state, there is also a new idea emerging, that of the intellectual limits of the individual, and their obligations to the collective. Since 'the body of the state must be guided as if by a single mind (and consequently the will of the commonwealth must be regarded as the will of all), what the commonwealth decides to be just and good must be held to be so decided by every citizen'. Therefore citizens are exhorted to carry out decrees even if they consider them 'unfair', as otherwise in challenging a given law, they challenge the collectively-invested right of all other citizens, and Spinoza confirms elsewhere that unanimity is greater where individual rights are lessened (2.16).¹²¹ This places citizens in the

¹²¹ A similar argument appears in Hobbes, 1998b, II.5.

uncomfortable but necessary position of not challenging the laws, however unreasonable, so long as they preserve peace and realise the common good ('the teaching of reason is wholly directed to seeking peace, but peace cannot be achieved unless the common laws of the commonwealth are kept inviolate': 3.6).

While this might leave opportunity open for rebels who might seek to overthrow an unpopular, violent regime and replace it with a peaceful, democratic one, Spinoza's politics of unanimity warns against this (3.6, 5.2).¹²² Though offering a compelling model of a reasonable republic, Spinoza's politics of unanimity is still too incoherent to explain political change, and its underdeveloped account of citizens' obligations to the common good needed development. But it is unlikely Spinoza would have presented such obligations, had the TP been finished (Ep 84 suggests only one missing section, that of 'Laws'). Over the remainder of the TP, Spinoza instead accounts how state institutions could direct the realisation of the common good, and we will challenge him on this in §4.6. If his argument for political freedom is to succeed, he will need to demonstrate how making reasonable citizens can prevent the emergence of political domination, like that assessed in §1.2.

§4.4 Making Citizens

For Spinoza, the highest perfection and freedom of a state comes through civic harmony and unanimity. Such harmony is possible only through a reasonable state that fulfils both the collective welfare and involves the active participation of its citizens. Through channelling their power and support, it is thereby able to secure itself from both external and internal dissolution. In this section we will explore Spinoza's new terminology for collectives, and present the claim that Spinoza is interested not with empowering the multitude per se (contra Negri, 2003, 194-8) or producing 'citizen-subjects' (contra Steinberg, 2009, 45, a

¹²² In §5.2 I explore a post-Spinozan theory of rebellion.

conflation of two distinct terms), but organising multitudes into sovereign powers, and turning passive subjects into active citizens. This is again premised on a more esoteric but now-familiar ontology of power, like that of the *vulgus* becoming a *populus* in §1.5. In assessing Spinoza's arguments for why reasonable citizens are produced by reasonable states, we will evaluate the extent to which unanimity is possible only in a state, and what Spinoza's account of political collectivity implies for commonality and collective desire.

Like much of Spinoza's thought, what is most remarkable is not so much the originality of the conceptual terms used, usually derived from contemporaries, but their startling re-definitions in his schema. Thus two somewhat commonplace claims derived from Machiavelli and Hobbes about the origin of citizenship become the basis of an incomplete yet original politics of collective power. In Chapter 5 Spinoza notes that 'rebellions, wars, and contempt for or violation of the laws are to be attributed not so much to the wickedness of subjects as to the faulty organisation of the state' (TP 3.2). The claim originates in Machiavelli (2003, III.29), who like Spinoza argues for the pre-eminence of popular sovereignty, but his republicanism extends only so far as determining the basis of good laws in balancing contrary social forces. Spinoza completes his claim by reaching to another political realist, Hobbes. 'Men are not born to be citizens, but are made so'. Again, one finds the claim intimated in *De Cive* (1998b, I.2; cf. Machiavelli, 2003, II.29), that men require 'training' for society, albeit based on a social contract founded in fear and violence. Instead, for Spinoza, human beings are the same everywhere, a claim he later makes at 7.27 (cf. TTP 17.26), and differences in civil behaviours reflect the institutions that determine them to act in a certain way, or remain passive. In such cases, like an individual possessed and in servitude to strong sad passions and acting not according to reason, such a weakly-constituted state has 'not attained the full right of commonwealth'. Such an ideal state is defined not just by the absence of war, but by a willing peace, a place where 'men pass their lives in harmony' in 'the true virtue and life of the mind' (5.5).

The influence of Machiavelli also bears on Spinoza's shift in political terminology. Referring back to the table in §1.5, we see that the high frequency of *vulgus* and *populus* now find equivalents in *multitudo* and *cives*. On the one hand, this indicates a departure from the theoretical terms of Hobbes in *De Cive*, who divided social forces between 'the people', 'a single entity, with a single will', bound by a social contract to transfer their natural right to the sovereign; and the 'multitude', the citizens and subjects who are the disorganised basis of a state (Hobbes, 1998b, XII.8). In Hobbes' confusing system, the sovereignty of the *populus* could be expressed 'paradoxically' (as he himself put) through the singular person of a king in a monarchy. In the TP, Spinoza fully overcomes the Hobbesian gauntlet: one's natural right is entirely co-extensive with one's power, and given that the people are numerically superior in any society, their natural right and power constitutes the basis of the state's security (Ep 55; TP 2.15).

The multitude, investing the greatest share of a state's collective natural right, are always the source of power. Hence by the TP, Spinoza removes the value-laden judgements of the TTP regarding the *multitudo* (cf. TP 7.27; Machiavelli, 2003, I.58) to present a politics whereby the *multitudo* constitute, by their very number, the greater part of the form of the state. Yet they are never sovereign, and remain ontologically passive in Spinoza's treatment. For whereas citizens (*cives*) 'enjoy all the rights of the commonwealth by civil right', subjects (*subditos*) are 'bound to obey the ordinances or laws of the commonwealth' (3.1). Though like Hobbes, Spinoza does not distinguish between the two (citizens are also subjects to sovereign power), there are elements of his underdeveloped thinking that explain why a state's subjects, including its *multitudo*, are accorded sovereignty but not self-rule. For in a remark that Sangiacomo (2015, 22) reads as a justification of the political use of fear, Spinoza describes how subjects are passive and fearful in following the state's laws, and do not freely obey them. He states: 'subjects are not in control of their own right and are subject to the commonwealth's right only to the extent that they fear its power or its threats, or to the

extent that they are firmly attached to the civil order' (3.8). Indeed, Spinoza's treatment of *multitudo*, this social number, accounts only for its passivity, and it would be more accurate to conceive it as the body in body politic.

It is akin to the discussion of being 'subject' to another's right earlier in §4.3, and how this mental or bodily subordination to another constitutes a form of servitude that endangers an individual's reasoning. While sovereignty is 'defined by the power of a multitude' (2.17), in being passive and subject to the influence of another, they lack control of their own right and exist in a form of servitude. Therefore Spinoza does not confer citizenship on the multitude, given that his earlier metaphysical and political commitments determine him to align collective becoming freer with the security of the state. Such security, realised by institutions and laws directed towards the common good, is endangered when the right of governing is given to those who can be determined to act against the common good in favour of their own interests, or those of another party. Therefore, while popular sovereignty (as above, 2.17) is the basis of any given state, its *potentia* – responsibility or *potestas* for administering its affairs for the common good – falls into the hands of a much smaller group of citizens who play a decisive role in Spinoza's three political forms, forming the various councils which determine its decisions or monitor their efficacy. It is through this commitment to natural right and its relation to reason that Spinoza will ultimately forbid servants, foreigners, children, criminals and women from participating in his ideal democracy (11.3-4).

The political realisation of this sovereignty has also transformed. The TTP sought to define and prescribe the necessary institutions and incentives for obedience, by means of faith, toleration, and freedom of speech. This was often made through a social contract (*contractus*) or agreement (*pactum*) of obedience to the sovereign republic (*res public*). In the TP the expression of this numerical power changes, and while an elementary *contractus*

is retained (4.6),¹²³ all mention of *pactum* is struck out. If the collective natural right or desire of the *multitudo* (mostly) constitutes power, then a broader definition of the state is required. To this end, Spinoza uses the term '*civitas*', the social body of citizens, traditionally used to signify Roman citizens. It represents the power of the city through its citizens, connoting both the condition of privileges in being a (Roman) citizen (as opposed to pleb, or slave), as well as the citizens united in a community or body. It is distinct from both *urbs*, 'city', the dwellings of the collected citizens, and *res publica*, 'public thing', 'the state', which is the entirety of the state including citizens with *sui juris*, and those without.¹²⁴ Thus the reasonable republic is a *civitas*, a social body of citizens, and its freedom is realised through their power of activity, their free participation in their state.

But here the limits of Aristotle's model are evident: in considering the three forms 'fixed' and eternal, Spinoza's account is unable to explain the relative degrees of empowerment within the forms. He does not seem to consider that a given multitude could be educated and enabled to become more reasonable and think for itself, thereby expanding the number of citizens, and his constitutional prescriptions give no positive mention to education whatsoever. In becoming too attached to a Hobbesian ideal of the state as a collective individual, Spinoza loses the flexibility that his earlier unanimity hypothesis afforded, rooted in communal individuals that can conjoin some of their powers into state-forms. As our criticisms made clear of the TTP (§3.7), Spinoza's exemplar gives no account of how individuals within collective forms become freer, and it is in this that their collective becomes more powerful.

¹²³ Spinoza *does* retain the social contract in 4.6, and writes of a 'transfer' of power elsewhere (e.g. 3.3, 6.5, 7.5, 8.2) though his readers tend to overlook this (e.g. Negri, 2004, 30; Balibar, 1994, 16; Malcolm, 2002, 49-50; Matheron, 1988, 295-6). Balibar rightly notes however that Spinoza dissolves the problematic distinction of speech and act in Hobbes, so that power is now an expression of collective desire (1994, 36; 2008, 119).

¹²⁴ The term is taken from Roman historians like Livy, Sallust, and Tacitus, and was theorised in greater depth by Cicero in *De republica*, all read by Spinoza, who usually reaches the same conclusions about Roman politics as Machiavelli.

From the outset, Spinoza seems to suppose that the human individual can serve as an exemplar for the *civitas*. If a state's unanimity is in reasonable, popular laws, then the direction of its 'mind' comes from its sovereign government. Just as an individual's natural right correlates to its power, 'the same is true of the body and mind of the entire state' (3.2), and in a civil order 'the citizens as a body are to be considered as a man in a state of nature' (7.22; cf. 3.11). With monarchies, Spinoza remarks that 'the king is to be regarded as the mind of the commonwealth, and this council [of citizen advisors] as the mind's external senses or body of the commonwealth, through which the mind perceives the condition of the commonwealth and does what it decides best for itself' (6.19; cf. 8.19 for the aristocratic equivalent). Elsewhere the poorly-constituted States of Holland is described as a 'headless body' (9.14), and Spinoza praises Machiavelli's method of treating the state's humours as like those of a human body (10.1).

Body politic motifs are common for this era: again, what is interesting is how Spinoza's rigorous analytical method derives unexpected conclusions from it. If the state-individual's natural right is increased by the reasonable dictates of its laws and institutions, then their inviolability or eternity is its greatest power. The phrasing is somewhat strange, but neatly links Spinoza's initial desire to map a state whose laws remain inviolate, unlike the United Provinces (TP title-page), with his politics of reasonable unanimity built over the first five chapters of the TP. As I will detail in the next section, the kinds of political institutions Spinoza devises are all concerned with maintaining an internal equilibrium of order and activity within a state's constitutive parts, a proportion of motion-and-rest (2p13) projected onto the level of desires. As we observed earlier in §4.2.3, it does not matter whether reason or passion motivates the citizen, as the instrumental good is in the inviolability of these laws.

Thus in an unusually concise sentence later in the TP, Spinoza remarks that ‘The life of the state is its laws’ (*Anima enim imperii jura sunt*) (10.9).¹²⁵ So long as this constitution or set of laws is correctly established and kept ‘inviolable’, then the state can exist in eternal (*aeternas*) security (*ibid.*). Such inviolability is dependent on both the collective investment of the people, and by the constitution being founded and operating according to reason. The laws cannot remain intact unless they are ‘protected both by reason and by the common feeling [*affectu*] of men’. Without this *common feeling*, this experience of commonality and realisation of desire collectively, those laws ‘dependent solely on the support of reason ... are likely to be weak and easily overthrown’. Benign dictatorships will tumble unless they are founded in the collective desire of the people, and such a desire is unlikely to tolerate domination, or weak laws and decisions that do not strive for the common good. The reason of a state is neither in reasonable laws nor in Machiavellian *raison d’état*, of nationalist interest as the ethical criterion of political action. Instead Spinoza’s model of unanimous political individuals, arranged in structures that realise their own common good through reasonable laws and popular support, supplies a model of collective individuation that rises up to infinity. In a very underdeveloped way then, Spinoza applies something akin to our maximal desires-joys test of §2.6.4: in their collective deliberations, the citizens re-calibrate and correct their associations of affects and ideas through the superior collective reason of the assembly, realising their shared collective good.

Therefore reason aims towards that which increases and maintains one’s power of activity and freedom, and so a secure state is most reasonable. As the TTP remarks, ‘nature certainly does not create nations, individuals do’ (17.26), and in the final case, Spinoza’s model of political eternity in reasonable laws supplies a framework wherein individuals

¹²⁵ Del Lucchese (2015, 14) reads a different claim into this concise sentence, finding it indicative of the multitude’s constituent power, whereas my reading identifies it as legislation that realises the common good of the collective.

realise their collective power, becoming-common (cf. §3.7), as they align their natural right into unanimous forms that enable the realisation of their individual goods, collectively. While Spinoza's account is too underdeveloped to supply a model of how passive subjects can become active citizens, its vision of the state as a liberatory basis for human freedom goes much further than either the statesmen or philosophers he used as his guides.

§4.5 The Eternal Republic

This chapter has so far been concerned with an exegesis of the TP under the claim that the work's context, sources and arguments have been under-explored. In the previous three sections we have outlined a politics of unanimity while noting in passing how claims of a liberation of the multitude or an abandonment of the social contract are over-stated. Instead, Spinoza's model of political reason through the state indicates a subordination of individual right to collective power. We have challenged him already on his failure to explain how citizens become more reasonable and self-determining, and the risks involved in removing all agency from individuals and burdening it on institutions. In this penultimate section I wish to press Spinoza and his readers more critically on this. This section will be divided into two sub-parts: §4.5.1 derives an axiom of popular sovereignty that is realised in the various institutions of a monarchy, aristocracy and democracy which consume the remainder of the TP. §4.5.2 uses these findings to evaluate three readings of Spinoza's late politics as pro-democratic, pro-aristocratic and pro-liberal. Reflecting on the course of argumentation regarding unanimity and collective right over this chapter and the last, it will set the stage for the conclusion which evaluates Spinoza's politics of becoming freer.

§4.5.1 Striving for Civil Order

In an argument that harks back to the TTP and Hobbes, Spinoza begins his discussion of monarchy with the observation that human beings are affectively disposed to form

communities with one another. It is 'out of a common feeling that they will naturally unite and be led by one mind, by a common hope, or fear, or common desire [*desiderio*] to avenge a loss' (6.1). This common feeling has its basis in our unanimity hypothesis earlier (§3.2.2), and though underdeveloped, we can observe that Spinoza's politics seeks to provide a meticulous engineering of how individual desires that cohere into common feelings can be utilised for the security of the state. Given that human beings 'by nature strive [*appetere*] for civil order' (ibid.) yet are also, by the same affective nature, predisposed to ambition and greed, resulting in all manner of conflicts, the state must not merely intervene in such disputes but prevent their very emergence. It achieves this by placing popular sovereignty and accountability at the heart of its institutional forms.

It is on this basis that Spinoza outlines the three classic forms of political organisation. But contrary to his earlier promises, Spinoza does not treat monarchy, aristocracy or democracy 'as they are', but instead as ideal models that each frame this equilibrium of power. He subjects each form to separate systematic treatment, where the aim is security, the problem is societal conflict, and the solution is a neat division of legislative, legal, civil and military powers. Whether it be the right of succession of a monarch, the selection and renewal of aristocratic patricians, or the limited conditions of *sui juris* of the democratic citizen, each model is proposed through an orderly division of functions. Each model of political organisation begins in the agreement and expression of support of representatives of the collective – clan representatives elect a monarch, or arrange for the 'best' to be selected as patricians (8.2), or decide among themselves who possesses sufficient experience and right to represent the rest of the collectivity.

Again, Spinoza relies heavily on Aristotle, both in his distinction of deliberative, executive and judicial decision-making (1992, IV, chs. 14-16), but more fundamentally in his preference for 'mixed' forms of constitutions within the state, assuring a virtuous 'mean' of

the best of different kinds of government. This is not simply an idealised or inaccurate treatment of these forms, but a rearrangement. Spinoza explains that he will consider 'the optimum of each kind of state' (8.31), in which their power is most absolute. Unlike Hobbes or Machiavelli, this model of 'absolute' power is not in the possession of the most divine right to rule, or in possessing the greatest military and economic resources to defend one's state. While democracies were considered in the TTP as the most natural form of organisation based on their expression of the popular will, Spinoza now reaches for a more fundamental explanation of natural political power: 'for if there is such a thing as absolute sovereignty [*imperium absolutum*], it is really that which is held by the multitude as a whole' (TP 8.3). It is this expression of absolute sovereignty which is the final means of mutating the classic forms of political organisation.

This explains why the model of monarchy presented is barely monarchical at all, at least by contemporary standards: out of a federation of cities, a state is formed; its subjects are divided into clans, who then *elect* a king (6.13-15, 7.25; they also elect the patricians of aristocracy, 8.1). This king is supported by a general council selected from a list of candidates nominated by each clan; this council is responsible for the majority of political administration and decision-making, and functions in effect like a sovereign house of representatives. In contrast to the rise of absolutist monarchies across Europe, Spinoza's model is one where the king must listen to and enact the will of large assemblies, which by virtue of the quantity of opinions presented, will automatically favour the most reasonable course (6.17-26, 7.5-13), a remarkably naïve position. Out of this 'large body of men, it follows that there can be no opinion conducive to the people's welfare that is not included among those submitted to the king by this council' (TP 7.5). Where divergences occur, the king intervenes and makes an overall decision. Power is thus dispersed equally among clans and through executive bodies, with a deeply-restricted aristocracy, retained only for employment as foreign ambassadors. This monarchy even includes the common ownership of property, with

equality granted to all subjects as citizens of the clans (cf. TP 6.11-12; 7.19). One finds this principle at work too in the discussion of aristocracy. Rather than being the rule of a small caste of hereditary nobles or wealthy merchants and landowners, Spinoza transforms it into a democratic meritocracy, whereby out of the same division of clans, the ablest individuals are nominated and voted onto a higher council of patricians. Unlike a monarchy, this form of rule has additional absolute power in that the council elected is sufficiently large and regenerated on a regular basis, that its will, rule and power are consistent and most representative of the desires of the rest of the state (TP 8.3).

In each case, the opinions and beliefs of the collectivity are no longer represented through mere freedom of speech, but through institutions of political representation that also function to restrict specific groups from becoming too powerful. The monarch and aristocratic council are limited by the laws of the constitution which must remain eternally inviolate; the power of the army is restricted by creating a citizen-militia; a state religion is created to ensure societal peace, with other religions permitted but heavily restricted (TP 3.10; 4.40; 8.46). This is the final principle drawn from Machiavelli – the systematic use of ‘checks’ and safeguards to ensure an equilibrium of power where the common welfare, and the collective desire of all members constituting a society, are the highest good. Despite the customary pessimism of most political theory of ancient, renaissance, and early modern times, Spinoza’s account remains entirely buoyed by a faith transferred from the free and reasonable individuals of the TTP and *Ethics*, to the free and reasonable collective individuals of the TP, this *civitas* acting ‘as if one mind’ and absolutely.

It leaves unanswered many practical issues however: how would a sovereign king remove the power of the nobles, or sustainably tax enough wealth to construct and fortify cities and armies without incurring the wrath of citizens, or even entirely enclose and take into communal ownership all property? How would a state be reorganised entirely into

clans? How is organised religion to be swept away from political power? Who or what could be trusted to oversee such a rational revolution in each form? What would motivate diverse cultures or classes of varying influences to equitably share power, and agree to new laws that administer the common good? These are pertinent questions, particularly when Spinoza has taken pains to describe how unreasonable and passively affected human behaviour is. The ideal state may be able to realise many of these functions – but first it must be installed, and then preserve itself against a likely storm of neighbouring powers who would sooner destroy a rival. This republic of reason would need to win friends and allies quickly, or else persuade citizens of other states that its model should be emulated. Spinoza's unfinished account supplies no pragmatic answer to this, despite the now-disingenuous distaste for utopian philosophising in the first chapter. But in many ways it anticipates the problems of those modern nation-states borne out of the Enlightenment revolutions of the United States, France and beyond.

§4.5.2 Making the People Free

Spinoza set himself the goal of defining the conditions for political stability, and ends up applying an unstated axiom of collective right, or popular sovereignty, as the basis of any state. Yet this application of popular sovereignty, his claim (via Machiavelli) that a state should not change its traditional form, and his view that democracy is the 'most natural' state (cf. TTP 16.11), have each generated differing interpretations as to which model he preferred. Though the answer should seemingly be democracy, by the muddled implications of some of Spinoza's own inferences in the TP there are compelling grounds to consider that it might not be. In this final sub-section I will evaluate these, and argue that the nature of Spinoza's late politics is *collectivist*, and does not fall under any immediate classical political category.

The more common and obvious interpretation of Spinoza's politics is that it is *pro-democracy*, and based on the TTP alone this is an easy position to defend. Spinoza makes a similar claim in the TP that it is the most natural and 'completely absolute state' (TP 11.2), and in addressing democracy last, Spinoza's method suggests that it approximates his model of political reason closest. Indeed this may be the case, but the features of democracy he derives are both unsatisfactory on their own count and to modern readers, for the exclusion of women, servants, foreigners and children from participating in democracy because they lack their own right (*sui juris*, 11.3-4), or independence of thought. For Spinoza's model much more closely approximates ancient Athens than that conceived of in the TTP, and he even requires a minimum amount of wealth for citizenship, which is only conferred to eldest sons (in contrast to the common ownership of property imagined under monarchy).¹²⁶ Thus its council may paradoxically have even less representatives than the 'aristocratic' council of the patricians (TP 11.2). Whereas Spinoza might have offered an argument for empowering women and servants to attain *sui juris*, his reasoning instead determines that women are naturally incapable of equal parity with men, and there the TP finishes abruptly, with '*reliqua desiderantur*' added laconically by the editors.

This final elitist move causes no end of problems for the pro-democratic Spinoza, and a number of speculative and cautious responses have followed. The speculative responses are best represented by Balibar, who directs us not to its stated features, but its function, 'an unequalled effort rigorously to think democracy as the *transformation of the state*' (1994, 33). This is certainly true of the TTP, where democracy correlates to popular government ('a united gathering of people which collectively has the sovereign right to do all that it has the power to do', TTP 16.8) – but by the TP, Spinoza reverts to its more

¹²⁶ There should also be some sensitivity to context. Early democratic republicanism was influenced by classic sources, and the kind of equality envisioned was one of all citizens, not of all people. The De la Courts also advocated a similar quasi-aristocratic democratic republicanism: see Weststeijn, 2012, 163-8.

traditional Athenian definition, while suffusing the principles of popular government into every other state form. Matheron claims then that democracy is an '*immanent* cause' of all other forms of sovereignty in the TP (1997, 217; cf. Negri, 2004, 9-14, 28-37, which argues similarly), but such an observation is meaningless if it does not determine what democracy is. If it is popular sovereignty, then his claim stands, but if it is the restrictive form Spinoza proposes, it does not.

Balibar, Matheron and Negri all argue that Spinoza's politics of the multitude is intrinsically democratic, and thus this late aberration can be overlooked when combined with Spinoza's pro-democratic arguments in the TTP and *Ethics*. Others like Sharp (2011, 112), James (2008, 129) and Montag (1999, 89) accept Spinoza's final elitism but offer a cautious route around it back to universal democracy, again through the precarious rhetorical strategy of evaluating Spinoza's claims against earlier arguments in the *Ethics*. Lloyd (1994, 160-164) and Lord (2011b, 1090) argue that women are deprived of political enfranchisement not because of their essential natures, but because of their socio-economic circumstances, and each offers tentative arguments for a universal capacity for political equality through the development of reason. While based on careful reconstructions of Spinoza's earlier arguments, these claims are too quick to dismiss as hypothetical 'fictions' (Lord, 2011b, 104) – ideas presented for critical discussion alone – what are instead political convictions for Spinoza, reflecting if not inconsistencies in his politics, certainly the influence of contemporary ideas about democratic enfranchisement and natural inequality.

James particularly highlights how the limits of Spinoza's own 'grave imaginative failure' (2008, 146) to conceive universal democratic agency indicates the wider problem of how the imagination can determine the *realism* of political possibilities. This is a compelling argument and one I am sympathetic to in thinking through and beyond Spinoza, but it does not resolve our inquiry into Spinoza's own professed politics. Despite these defences, in

assigning citizenship to those with sufficient income, Spinoza has removed the *demos* from this democracy and replaced it with a mediocre oligarchical form. I would argue that it is this confusion he makes between democracy and aristocracy – and indeed, his claim that aristocratic governments should be composed of the ‘best’, most able members of a given upper class – that ultimately renders his democracy weaker than aristocracy, even if initially more sincere.

Thus a less common reading is that Spinoza becomes *pro-aristocracy* in the TP. Feuer blends context and argument to infer that Spinoza became ‘repelled by the mob, its cruelty, its irrationality’ (1987, 161) and inadvertently drifted to a mercantile aristocratic position, like that outlined in Chapter 9, where Spinoza discusses the United Provinces. Prokhovnik has more forthrightly challenged the ‘normative pre-eminence’ of democracy in the TP (1997, 108), arguing instead that the importance of the deliberative council is best realised in an aristocratic form, where members are chosen by merit, not by birth (unlike democracy). Indeed Chapter 9’s arguments for the reform of the Dutch ‘aristocratic’ model does suggest some preference for it, or at least its restoration as a more adequately-constituted republican aristocracy (9.14), with an expanded patrician class. Were the kind of aristocratic model he envisions implemented, with its large patricians’ councils, checks on power, and even distribution of justice and political representation, then the state’s representatives would be most possessive of reason. Thus ‘since we have shown that the fundamental laws of both kinds of aristocracy are in conformity with reason and with the common feelings of men, we can therefore affirm that, if any states can be everlasting, these will necessarily be so’ (TP 10.9). Indeed if patricians could be found free of bias and were ‘guided only by zeal for the public good, there would be no state to compare with aristocracy’ (11.2).

Yet for an aristocracy to be maintained, Spinoza must draw on the ‘pomp and ceremony’ (TTP Pref.6) like that identified as the basis of superstition. These patricians are given unique privileges to worship inside the oversized cathedrals of the state religion, are to be addressed by honorific titles and wear particular clothing to identify their authority among the subjects (TP 8.46-7). Given his intrinsic commitments to universal reason and freedom, it is hard to imagine how such state-sanctioned hierarchy would remain secure without incurring the anger and indignation of the vast number of subjects excluded from political representation. Only an extremely well-organised commonwealth with the most meticulously accountable and publicly-spirited institutions could maintain such a regime. Though the aristocratic patricians are likely to be more competent in administering the common good than a democracy of male merchants, there is still much left to be desired, and Spinoza as much as admits this in 11.2 later, as ambitious patricians form factions and bar the best men from attaining power. Yet as we have also now observed, his model of democracy cannot prevent this either.

A third reading considers Spinoza’s politics *pro-liberal*, affirming toleration and freedom of speech and thought, and leaving it at that. This position tends to emerge from egoist readings (cf. §2.7), which elevate the rights of the individual over that of the authoritarian state. Thus Smith claims that ‘*the exercise of free speech is the goal of social policy*’ (1997, 160; cf. Allison, 1987, 191), while Den Uyl supplies what Steinberg calls a ‘deflationary interpretation’ of political freedom, being of a minimal self-interested sort, concerned with ‘merely peace – that is, security and harmony’ (1983, 114; Steinberg, 2009, 38). We disadvantage Smith, Den Uyl and others by presenting them at the end of our assessment of Spinoza’s late politics: by any measure, individual free speech and a minimal state are the opposite of the unanimous political measures he prescribes in the TP. But we must do this, to at least impress on new readings of Spinoza’s politics that if their claims (so often derived from *Ethics*, or the TTP) are not consistent with the TP, then they must either

acknowledge it as a development in thought, as we have here, or restrict the boundaries of their claims.

It may be more fruitful to reflect on why the TP is so indifferent to liberalism, in its modern sense. Steinberg skewers the liberal reading in order to assemble a compelling account of civic liberation, through its enabling of its subjects' power of acting, determining them to act 'as-if' reasonably in security and peace (2009, 44-6). But the liberalism Steinberg critiques is only of a Lockean and individualist kind, rooted in private property rights or freedom from 'non-domination' by arbitrary state power (cf. Pettit, 2002, ch. 3), and I would encourage us to think Spinoza's politics of collective power more boldly than merely a foil to Locke's liberal tradition. The *freedom* and free citizens Spinoza imagines being made by his optimum states is of a collective kind, as we have termed it in the thesis, but it is not so different from the *salus populi suprema lex* of Cicero and Roman republicanism, being the common good of Spinoza's third law of political reason. The argument is not that the individual's freedom is contingent on a secure state (like the *self-interest* argument of §3.2.1), and therefore the individual should begrudgingly tolerate a degree of state interference (e.g. minor taxation) as they go about their affairs. Rather, as Spinoza seeks to show, and as Skinner (1997, 197-9) derives from Machiavelli, freedom as a kind of elementary capability is only possible in a secure and peaceful state, and the greatest freedom is in living in a capable, active and joyous collective that participates in that state's affairs.

Such a reasonable collective can withstand the servitude that it would otherwise fall under through its natural affective vulnerability to fears, fortune and superstition, and domination by authorities. This form of collective contains a harmony of relations and quality of interactions that enable its parts to acquire common notions and cooperate with each other. Spinoza's politics is intrinsically collectivist. In recognising the good of unanimity

as the very basis of civil security, Spinoza aligns the priority of desire (as natural right) with the requirements of reason for peace and security. He locates sovereignty in the collective right of a state's population, but restricted somewhat by his Roman-republican concept of *sui juris*, limits the agency of citizenship to those who are considered already capable of thinking in the interests of the common good.¹²⁷ Though a worthwhile premise, it remains inconsistent with his treatment of the affects in *Ethics*, in which ambition, greed and envy are universal qualities and which, without sufficient distribution of power or accountability, will cripple his political individuals from acting effectively (Spinoza admits as much in his brief critique of aristocracy at 11.2). While becoming freer is conditional on living in a state, any state alone is insufficient for our freedom. Spinoza's attempt to make freedom as the state is compelling, though it is not clear how his collective is to *become* reasonable. In the conclusion of this chapter, I will evaluate the limits of Spinoza's late politics of unanimity.

§4.6 Conclusion

Back in §1.2 we briefly referred to Lordon's concept of 'recommune', presenting it as one among many recent liberatory readings of Spinoza's politics. As it did not concern the problem of servitude we left that reference there, but this chapter's focus on unanimity now affords sufficient light to consider it. For Lordon, *recommune* (derived from *res communa*, 'common thing') offers a means to conceive of an alternative politics to the hierarchy of the division of labour, one that offers 'equal participation in the determination of a shared collective destiny' (2014, 131). The term involves more modesty than *res publica*, 'since it is narrower in number and in purposes than the public thing', yet contains the promise of shared life organised according to 'radical democracy' (ibid., 132). While in its textual

¹²⁷ This limitation echoes though does not repeat exactly the distinction of *collegialiter* and *collective* observed in the TTP in §1.4: in both cases, Spinoza separates the collective right or *body* in body politic which forms the state, from those *populi/cives* capable of deliberating its affairs with independent minds, focused on the common good.

context of workplace organising, one wonders what *recommune* brings that is not already entailed in worker-cooperatives, Lordon's construction of this concept via Spinoza is an illuminating way to reflect on how Spinoza's politics of collective power, unanimity and reason can energise liberatory struggles in so many contexts.

For as we have determined over the last four chapters, while Spinoza is concerned with the freedom of the human mind, the means for achieving it lie in the quality of one's relations with others. These relations bring us into being and nurture our development long before we can independently develop our own ideas and understand the causes of our affects, and so the political has a foundational role for enabling the becoming freer of as many as possible, or as Balibar nicely puts it, 'as many as possible, thinking as much as possible' (2008, 98). We challenged a prevailing reading in §2.5.2, that Spinoza's vision of human reason is aimed only at the highest pitch of exclusive adequacy. Our turn instead to a common becoming-freer allowed us to read Spinoza's pessimism about the incapability of the *vulgus* to live reasonably as being not merely misanthropic or elitist, but concerned with the elementary conditions of empowerment, in a life freed from fear and guided towards cooperation. For as Lordon would also remind us, no human being can be free of the 'exodetermination' (2014, 159) of the passive affects – our natural condition as bodies and minds that are finite and greatly limited by their dependence on other external bodies necessarily places us in conditions of passivity, with resulting affects of sadness and joy. A politics of uncontaminated reason is therefore of little use. Instead, our greatest freedom *or* power – for these are always equivalent terms, and that which reason guides us to realising – is in combining with others of a common nature, thus increasing our power exponentially, to the extent that our collective can remain harmoniously organised, which is no small feat.

This brought us to a politics of prophecy and the imagination, a universal means of knowledge and one capable of immense social good. Imaginaries can produce and extend

feelings of commonality in communities, increasing their cooperative behaviours and multiplying the opportunities for mutual assistance, joy, and the acquisition of common notions. But concerned by the alarming rise of theological power and the looming collapse of the liberal republican party of De Witt, Spinoza drops his politicisation of the imagination and argues for the free circulation of speech. His resulting social epistemology is weak – how are ordinary Dutch Calvinists supposed to become more reasonable, if subject to the mere number of others' uninformed free tongues, or the pomp and ceremony of powerful voices? – and politically unsustainable, providing no apt model for preserving the Dutch republic, or restoring it, should the theologians and monarchists seize power.

For all the remarkable developments of the TP – and in this chapter we have focused on collectivity, and the realisation of civil security through reasonable citizens – the imagination barely returns, and only in the somewhat cynical manner of elevating the patricians of aristocracy. This in itself weakens the account, especially one whose method founded sovereign power (chs. 3-4) in natural right (ch. 2). But by Spinoza's own standards, its method is already fatally compromised: in seeking the highest good and optimum societies that realise the state's virtue in security, he himself fabricates three different utopias, and applies a quasi-teleological model of little use to his ontology of immanent, self-determining power. His models do not explain how forms of political servitude emerge in a given society, nor how they might be contained (say, for instance, if an elitist cult were to become influential among the council-members). Given our interest in becoming freer, the TP (like the Hebrew exemplar of the TTP) gives no account of how subjects are to become more reasonable, having an active and participatory role in causing their own ideas and affects. Where is the desire for collectivity to emerge from? The TP's states would need a kind of nationalism to sustain them, a common good that is not a universal one, for otherwise the subjects will become restless against the decisions of an elite class of citizens.

In refusing to offer a collectivist republican imaginary or programme for popular education, all we are left with is the theoretical results of Spinoza's speculative political science, one purposed for the late 17th century, less so times since. Spinoza's zeal for deliberative assemblies is not inconsistent with Balibar's politics of communication (§3.6), but it has little defence against Hobbes' critique that such assemblies were a 'nuisance' and 'inept' (1998b, X.10) when run by ambitious, vain and ignorant citizens representing a narrow part of the population. While Spinoza is theoretically committed to collective power, and the TP gives numerous instances of it, we can agree with James (2008, 146) that Spinoza's social imagination of equality is still limited by his context, applying to fellow citizens rather than fellow human beings.

Accounts of the politically liberatory Spinoza snag against such thorns, but there is as much in the TP to commend it. At last, Spinoza offers something approaching a coherent normative political theory, one in which the common good is realised by the complete investment of individual desires into the collective functions of the state. The state does not offer merely security to its citizens, it also increases their power of acting, as we noted with Steinberg (though, again, Spinoza gives no account of how citizens might think for themselves within this). Spinoza's model of political unanimity that results also explains some of the problems of agency for group or plural subjects touched on in §3.7: their activity or obligations to each other do not emerge naturally or innately, but reflect dispositions that they must be made capable of. Spinoza's suggestion of *making citizens* is exemplary on this count: one could read it in an Althusserian way and recognise an immanent critique of ideology and social constructions; one could also read it a traditional republican way as outlining the kinds of civic virtues, affects and desires required to establish more reasonable, cooperative societies. This enchanted mirror encourages looking from multiple perspectives (to borrow Moreau's image of Spinoza's reception: 1996, 408).

To take a term from earlier (§2.7), the collective reason and desire that is produced by the unanimous polity is an ‘emergent property’ – one that explains the emergence of civil rights and obligations without identifying their sub-division in the minds of individuals. Yet for such an emergent property to realise the capabilities of the individuals that comprise its civil order, it needs more than just deliberative political forms. The way of life of becoming freer involves an education of the imagination and joy, so that the possibility and pleasure in events or thoughts that correlate to our actual self-preservation comes to be freely accepted and desired (§2.6.1-2, §2.6.4). The last two chapters have now correlated this self-preservation with the common good. While Spinoza’s concepts have set up all the pieces for a game of collective desire, spread out over a board of nature’s immanent, infinite power, and even provided a theoretical rulebook, he leaves us with no ability to play. What can one do if one does not live in an optimum polity? What can the rebel do to resist, or change entrenched but unfair laws? Our self-causing willful subject (§2.6.3) will find little reassuring about the collective rationality of the TP, and if the freedom-loving individual happened to be born in the contemporary Ottoman Empire, Spinoza’s exemplar of political servitude, then the TP effectively offers little more than quietism.

Though Lordon’s *recommune* is, in itself, an appealing but insubstantial call to arms, it highlights what this thesis finds most distinctive about Spinoza’s politics of desire: *commune*, the ‘common feeling’ (TP 10.9, §4.4) through which political associations begin, or the commonly-held conviction at the root of our societies, that ‘nothing is more useful to man than man’ (E4p18s, §3.2.1). Becoming freer begins in what is communal, like common notions, or bonds of friendship, and reasonable communities directed by the love of a common good, their shared life and power. But it is not merely a common thing: albeit doomed from the outset, Spinoza’s desire to identify the highest good in the *koinonia* or association of reasonable beings requires taking the common as a premise towards universality. The unanimity under reason Spinoza envisions, and which his ontology of power

leads him towards, is one that is not limited to a cultural or national kind, but which extends out to infinity, embracing all. For individuals to realise their immanent power they must overcome two kinds of servitude which render them passive and weakened by other forces. An internal and affective sort, like that Lordon helped us identify, and a political sort (and a consequence of the first), being the desire of ambitious, fearful and greedy individuals to maintain their power at the expense of others. Becoming-common is the precondition to becoming-universal, and everything begins and ends with desire and the affects. In the next chapter I will pursue my own trajectory through the concept of collective desire, animating Spinoza's concepts of freedom, desire and reason with new arguments for changing political forms (§5.2), extending commonality and developing collective political subjectivity (§§5.3-5), and the use of the state in the collective becoming-freer of a people (§5.6). Reason's republic does not have to remain a utopia.

Chapter 5. Desiring Freedom

§5.1 Introduction

At the close of chapter 7 of the *Political Treatise*, Spinoza makes a rejoinder to critics who might dismiss his politics of collective power as mere utopianism. Against those elitists who claim fear, ignorance and violence belong not to humanity as a whole, but just the common people (*plebs*), he replies ‘the nature of all is one and the same [*communis*]’ (TP 7.27). Instead ‘we are deceived by power and culture’, and confuse social customs with the natural order, so that the misdeeds of aristocrats are ‘honourable and becoming’, while those of the poor require criminal punishment. This problem of power and culture introduces the questions of the final chapter: what inhibits the desire for freedom, such that individuals cannot or do not recognise their common nature? How does one distinguish a liberatory collective desire from a reactionary one? What can liberatory collective movements do to overpower repressive societal institutions and robust mental structures of domination?

This chapter opens up the problem of collective desire through and beyond Spinoza, and compared with the analytical assembly-work of the last four chapters, is more speculative and ambitious in scope. It is premised on a finding reached in §4.5.2, that Spinoza’s political project for becoming freer is hamstrung by its inability to enable and nurture self-determining individuals on a collective scale. Spinoza’s ‘ambivalence’ about the capabilities of the *vulgus* as we described it in §3.5, and his political commitments to his own republican government, mean that he does not offer a coherent theory of political change. To realise §4.6’s promise of making Spinoza’s ontology of power ‘play’ out politically, I will first explore Spinoza’s critique of the rebel (§5.2.1). I distinguish between a merely *ethically liberatory* reading of Spinozan freedom (§5.2.2), and a *politically liberatory* one, working

particularly with Matheron and indignation, an affect of resistance (§5.2.3). While siding with the politically liberatory reading, I explore its own limitations in the reasonable individual subject, weaknesses it shares with Spinoza's own account in seeking to defend it. In our dissatisfaction with the limits of Spinozan resistance, I re-assemble a politics of collective power rooted in the affect of emulation (§5.2.5), and use this as a new basis for devising an alternative trajectory out of the impasse of political quietism and 'Left melancholia' (Brown, 1999) that restricts revolutionary imaginings.

Equipped with this new conceptual resource in emulation, I will then undertake a lateral study of *collective desire*, that is, the desire for collective empowerment and how this desire becomes shared in common (§5.4). Faithful to a Deleuzian image of philosophy as the creation of concepts (2009, 5), the remainder of the chapter resembles a mechanic's workshop, bringing together a diversity of parts and techniques to assemble and animate a politics of collective desire. In §5.4 I introduce and develop the problem of desire through two Marxist thinkers, Dean and Lukács, and their account of the revolutionary desire of the oppressed. These readers will aid the chapter to identify and ascertain how desire is a relevant liberatory medium on a political level in the first place, while situating it in our earlier formulations of resistance and the affects. Critically reacting against what Benjamin identifies as a 'phantasmagorical' individualism, I present and define a concept of collectivity in this more expansive liberatory political context (§5.3.2). Drawing on the earlier distinction between the merely ethically and the politically liberatory Spinoza, I then assess the political problem of the individual's relation to the collective. Using J. Gilbert, Sartre and Gramsci, I identify what we could call three different *attributes* of the collectivity problem.

With this expanded concept of collectivity, I then draw on the earlier account of the collective individual (§3.2) to outline the role of interdependence and relationality in collective political subjects (§5.3.4). Theories of interdependence in biology prove

illuminating as I drill further into the intrinsic reality of collective power across living forms, leading into a series of inter-connected sections concerned with explicitly political formulations of common power. Deriving a Gramscian concept of ‘common sense’ (§5.4), I explore the revolutionary role of the people as an antagonistic subject in the work of Rancière, Laclau, and Mouffe. Questions of democratic agency, as opposed to constructions of public choice, help clarify the relation of collective desire to democracy, and I use Gramsci, Reich and Poulantzas as interlocutors to connect politics back to a fundamental striving for freedom (§5.5). Reflecting on Spinoza’s own course of argumentation, this leads to a final and substantial section on state power (§5.6). Despite the intrinsic problems of his account (§4.6), can Spinoza’s turn to collective reason and liberation through the state illuminate a path for revolutionary collective desire, or does it lead to another form of servitude? The chapter concludes with an outline of an ethics of desire that can fulfil the needs of collective and individual freedom (§5.7).

§5.2 Is it Reasonable to Rebel?

On the face of it, Spinoza yields few satisfactory answers to the question. Social forces are regulated and reproduced by the state in his argument – hence the detailed accounts of the three optimal state forms’ executive, juridical and deliberative functions in the TP, assessed in §4.5.1 – but Spinoza is forthright in his warnings against any individual seeking to actively upturn the state’s sovereign authority. In this section I will consider four aspects of this question: I evaluate Spinoza’s arguments against rebellion and sedition, as well as one possible rejoinder based on historical context, which is found to be weak (§5.2.1). I then identify and criticise another possibility for freedom, the merely ethically liberatory reading, which is also challenged (§5.2.2). I then explore another possibility using indignation, the chief of several affects of resistance (§5.2.3), a position with more virtues than the previous

two perspectives but still weakly substantiated. I finally derive a new argument for rebellion using the imitative affect of emulation (§5.2.5).

§5.2.1 Spinoza's Arguments Against Rebellion

Obedience to the sovereign is effectively a dictate of reason in the *Ethics*. Things that bring 'discord to the state' are considered evil (E4p40), and the free individual guided by reason desires to adhere to and 'keep the common laws of the state' (E4p73).¹²⁸ Spinoza repeats in a letter to Ostens that the citizen is 'duty bound to ... obey the commands of the sovereign power' (Ep 43), and a similar language is deployed in the TP, that 'the more a man is guided by reason... the more steadfast he will be in preserving the laws of the state and in carrying out the commands of the sovereign whose subject he is' (TP 3.6). Even if considered unfair, the subject is unconditionally 'bound to carry them out' (TP 3.5). As Barbone observes, the 'wise person perceives that obedience *always* promotes his/her greater interests... and so he/she does nothing to contravene the sovereign's authority' (1999, 106). These interests lie in the preservation of the state's sovereignty, understood in Spinoza's Hobbesian contractualism as a collective investment of desire in the authority of the sovereign. Defying the state's laws thereby contravenes the natural right of one's fellow citizens, something the rational and free human being will readily avoid, as we argued in §1.6.2.

The TTP more frequently admonishes 'sedition', a term connoting the passive and unwitting complicity of the common people in the destruction of their own state (cf. TTP 17, particularly). It is said to arise with objective social causes to which citizens often 'surrender' (Pref.10; 17.28; 19.6; 20.14). Spinoza warns 'agitators and rebels' against making 'a seditious attempt to abolish the law against the magistrate's will' (20.7), insisting that it 'very rarely happens' that sovereigns make absurd commands (16.9). If faced with injustice, one should merely submit one's grievance to the sovereign authority and genially await a formal

¹²⁸ Stephenson describes this as the 'ethico-rational obligation' to obey the law (2011, 163-4).

response (20.7). I have already accounted for Spinoza's poor estimation of the capacity of the *vulgus* in §1.5 and §3.6. Even in the case of the English Civil War, where a quasi-democratic revolt against an unpopular sovereign led to a short-lived republican commonwealth, Spinoza is quick to condemn the English people for their 'fatal example' in violating 'the right of a legitimate king' just to replace him with a 'new monarch with a different title' (18.8). It is exceedingly 'dangerous' to depose a monarch, 'risking the total ruin of the state' (18.7; 18.10), and Spinoza cautions against such imprudence (cf. Sharp, 2013, 135-8).

When confronted with similar premises, some commentators have cautioned whether one can describe Spinoza as revolutionary at all. Feuer describes a disillusioned drift towards aristocracy in the TP (1987, 160-1; cf. §4.5.2), an observation Verbeek also makes of the TTP (2003, 141-3), while Den Uyl recasts Spinoza as a 'conservative' advocate of rational egoism (1983, 105; §2.7). Such concerns have been rebutted on two counts by readers persuaded of a politically liberatory Spinoza, and this alternative line of response will help me define resistance in Spinoza.

The first is its historical context: the Dutch rebels of the latter half of the 1660s, during the composition of the TTP, were not freedom-loving democrats but violent and intolerant Calvinists and despotic supporters of the House of Orange. 'Revolution in the Netherlands meant the victory of reaction', notes McShea (1968, 191), and Spinoza feared a populist insurrection precisely '*against* freedom of speech and the open-minded respect for religious pluralism' necessary for freedom (Stephenson, 2011, 194). Hence the TTP describes as 'seditious' the very views of the Calvinists that seek to separate civil law from divine law (TTP 19.14) and self-appoint their authority by 'divine right' (19.19) over the common good.¹²⁹

¹²⁹ We are being somewhat charitable to this reading: Spinoza is clear in his objections to sedition as such, and his prior commitment to individuals honouring their *pactum* or common feeling with others means that by allowing rebellion, he would encourage an individual to prioritise their own desires at the expense of the collective. For another version of Spinoza's criticism of the rebel that relies on a

Such seditious views began to permeate law after 1672, with the downfall of De Witt and his supporters, and the appointment of William III of Orange as stadtholder, resulting in the ascendancy of orthodox Calvinists across the Dutch city councils and civil life (Israel, 2001, 286-7). In response to the triumph of the *ultimi barbarorum*, the TP reiterates the need for prudence in politics: ‘how imprudent are the many attempts to remove a tyrant when the causes that made the prince a tyrant cannot be removed’ (TP 5.7). This point expands on an underdeveloped observation in the TTP regarding the English: they failed because they did not ‘change their form of state’ (TTP 18.8), and so exchanged King Charles for King Oliver. Unless the institutional and cultural forms that produce monarchy and monarchical obedience are fundamentally transformed, they will continue to perpetuate themselves even after a successful insurrection.¹³⁰

The second rebuttal of the conservative Spinoza draws on his political naturalism, wherein ‘the right of nature extends as far as its power extends’ (TTP 16.2; cf. Ep 50). This rationale enables Spinoza to refute Hobbes in prioritising democracy as the ‘most natural’ form of government, as it more effectively incorporates and realises the natural right, or desire, of the greater part of its subjects, upon which its power depends (TTP 16.11). It also knowingly dispenses with juridical debates of political legitimacy in Grotius and Bodin and absolute power in Hobbes (the latter merely a ‘juridical fiction’ as Montag observes, 1999 65), by asserting a simpler naturalistic criterion, that a state is as powerful as the mental and physical activity and investment of its constituent parts. Hence any socio-political force that can muster sufficient popular force to overcome and transform an existing state is, by its ability to secure itself, valid. This argument is raised by Del Lucchese (2009, 60), Sacksteder (1975, 125), Matheron (1988, 295-6), Balibar (1994, 15), Klever (1984, 99) and many others,

tenuous claim of ‘rational similarity’, see Della Rocca, 2010. He finds rebellion unjustifiable (180-1) under any circumstances, whereas we will argue here that Spinoza’s naturalism and moral anti-realism (cf. §2.4) commits him to this inconvenient conclusion.

¹³⁰ I will return to significance of transforming the state for revolutionary theory in §5.6.

and it will no doubt continue to be made. As Montag puts it, there exists ‘no system of rule, no matter how apparently absolute, that does not rest on an equilibrium of forces and the ruler who ignores this fact will not rule very long’ (1999, 61). This ‘insurmountable antagonism’, as Montag calls it, is both the condition of reason and what threatens its very stability.

Yet Spinoza’s political naturalism is a double-edged sword. Arendt illuminates the conundrum: ‘revolutions are more than successful insurrections’ (1965, 24). Spinoza’s political naturalism accommodates *any* kind of insurrectionary movement that can then establish broad popularity and a degree of peace, be it militaristic, fascist, theocratic or laissez-faire capitalist. Chapter 1 indicated what forms of servitude this includes, including where individuals mistakenly believe they are democratically represented or carry influence in the decision-making of the powerful. This raises the question then of how democratic and egalitarian political movements can succeed. Two possibilities emerge: I explore the latter, indignation, in §5.2.3, as it is a less common and more apposite response to the problem of political change. The former is more familiar to liberatory readings of Spinoza, and involves a reconstruction of Spinoza’s account of human liberation in *Ethics* (a position I call the merely ethically liberatory Spinoza).

§5.2.2 Critique of the Merely Ethically Liberatory Spinoza

Often commencing with an affirmation of the conatus (for instance Dumoulié describes it as a modal incarnation of divine power and ‘pure positivity’: 2003, 46), the merely ethically liberatory Spinoza reading follows a line of thought led by Deleuze (1988, 27-9) in politicising the joyous affects as being themselves empowering. This over-reliance on the passive affect of joy – criticised in §2.5.2 for confusing the symptom of ontological empowerment with its cause, using the nutritionists – then leads to an over-estimation of the benign thoughts and activities of an intrinsically revolutionary ‘multitude’ (Negri, 2003, 194-8), or a relationally

autonomous collective (Armstrong, 2009, 59) or transindividual grouping (Balibar, 1997b, 33-4; Sharp, 2011, 35-42), acting and thinking together in ways conducive to reason and peace. The liberation of the individual mind collectively enhances those around it (Stephenson, 2011, 26-8; Smith, 2003, 200-1).

It is an engaging reading, and one that will also no doubt continue to be made, but it fails to explain political change on three counts. Firstly, its emphasis on rational discourse and communication prioritises the academic presuppositions of its proponents, relying on a sphere of the 'political' in which, according to critics like Spivak (1988, 271-80), Rancière (2007, 32-5), and Mouffe (1993, 4-6), the majority are silenced, excluded, or incapable of confidently intruding. It is in danger of perpetuating a politically ineffectual politics of deliberation, 'consensus' and creativity such as that espoused by Rawls and Habermas, which serve to mystify with parliamentary politics a much narrower consensus over the virtues of private wealth.¹³¹ Secondly, it attempts to impose the rare virtues of the free philosopher – an exemplar in Spinoza's ethical system that one might aspire to emulate, rather than become – over the capabilities of the people, diminished by vested interests. Nowhere in Spinoza's political works is an estimation of the individual mind's liberation considered possible for entire social groups.¹³² Yet the TTP and TP are both concerned with how collective groups can live by the guidance of reason, without necessarily being aware of what these dictates of reason are. Pulling together arguments from Chapter 2 (*critique of exclusive adequacy restriction*, §2.5.2) and Chapter 3 (*collectivist argument for cooperation*, §3.2.1), this imposition of the individual/exclusive over collective/relative confuses the ethical for the political, and prioritises the former without accounting for its realisation in the latter. Thirdly, it cannot explain how the activity or passivity of an individual – for

¹³¹ See Mouffe, 2000, ch. 1; for a compromise position see Saar, 2014, 28. I qualify this assertion at §5.5.1.

¹³² Our earlier criticism of the exclusive adequacy restriction at §2.5.2 also applies here.

instance, their suffering or servitude – leads to forms of collective solidarity and mutual defence. Nor does it sufficiently account for how political movements enlist and mobilise disempowered social forces *before* their eventual empowerment as collective unities, the very problems of enlistment and capture raised in §1.6.2.

What sparks the initial moment of solidarity, necessary to political association? How do agents involved in this collective moment enlist others in a broader movement directed at transforming existing social institutions for an egalitarian common good, capable of overcoming the powerful and dangerous forces whose natural right is invested in defending them? To appraise these questions, I now turn to a smaller number of Marxist readings that have instead politicised indignation in Spinoza.

§5.2.3 Indignation

In the *Political Treatise*, Spinoza observes that ‘the discord and sedition that is often raised in the commonwealth never lead to the dissolution of the state by its citizens ... but to a change in its form’ (TP 6.2). Discussing this passage, Del Lucchese (2009, 78-9) notes that Spinoza has revised his political naturalism since the TTP. Now the state is the natural association that all human beings gravitate towards for the purpose of self-preservation, whether driven by reason or passive affects. By implication then, discord and sedition are the means by which a state’s form is changed. Whereas conflict in a state was imprudent and to be avoided at all costs in the TTP, it now becomes ‘an ineradicable element of its physiology’ (2009, 78). Finding itself subject to forces of authoritarian control that seek to diminish and divide its collective strength, the multitude experiences ‘the affect of

indignatio’ as a ‘drive and capacity for resistance’ (60).¹³³ Political repression thereby becomes constitutive of the ‘life in common’, the first shared affect of the multitude (62).

Montag too notes the significance of indignation for a revolutionary politics in Spinoza. In a discussion of another part of the TP (3.9), he also asserts that ‘a state does not have the right to do that which will bring about the indignation of the majority’ (1999, 66), as otherwise it will collapse. Yet both commentators leave these observations tantalisingly underdeveloped, and allude only in passing to the work of Matheron (1988, 416-7; 1994b, 153-65), where this politicised indignation finds its fullest expression. Indignation is an affect that begins in the imagination, being ‘hatred towards him who has done evil to another’ (E3p22s), and related to pity, both requiring a judgement that the subjected party is ‘like us’, of a common nature. Matheron then departs from Spinoza’s own argumentation by asserting that it is also an imitative affect, that is, one whose joy or sadness is increased when we see another we judge of a common nature being affected by joy or sadness (1988, 156).¹³⁴ For Matheron, when we imagine someone affecting a beloved object with sadness, ‘we shall be affected with hate towards him’ (E3p27c1). He then applies this to an individual living under a tyrant. The tyrant will necessarily be hated because they rule by fear, which causes sadness, and as ‘hatred is nothing but sadness accompanied by its external cause’, the subject’s fear leads to hatred.¹³⁵

There are two textual problems with this argument already regarding the political use of fear and passive affects to which I will return.¹³⁶ What Matheron develops with the argument is most interesting. Why do subjects not avenge the hated tyrant, given the fear

¹³³ In this section I refer to an ‘affect of resistance’ or an ‘affective moment of resistance’ to describe various affects that, as experienced, determine the subject to a position of political resistance. Indignation is the primary one, but others include glory and benevolence (Bove) or fortitude (Stolze).

¹³⁴ Cf. E3p27-p28, 3p34, 3p40, 3ad30, 4app14; and evaluating Matheron, Kwek, 2015, 174.

¹³⁵ The Spanish *Indignado* movement against austerity is a neat demonstration of this.

¹³⁶ These concern fear and the intrinsic weakness of sad passive affects – see §5.2.5. It should also be noted that indignation is not an imitative affect in Spinoza’s analysis, contra Matheron.

it produces in them? '[I]f the subjects abstain, it is only to the extent that one or several amongst them, because they feel isolated, has no hope of achieving it' (1988, 416). If a tyranny can prevent individuals from recognising their common nature and grievances, disaggregating their collective power into isolated individual units, then it can reduce instances of collective rebellion. However when the tyrant steals, kills and destroys on a large scale (e.g. Nero's Rome, TP 4.4), so many become disempowered and filled with hatred, and soon cannot help but recognise each other's suffering.¹³⁷ By affective imitation, their indignation and hatred is collectively multiplied, and 'each perceives their hatred is universally shared'. In a process akin to the 'social contract', they all 'naturally coalesce' and with 'a union made of force', their indignation becomes a collective power, and insurrection now has 'the greatest chance of success'. The tyrant can then either grant concessions that persuade the indignant subjects to reinvest their right in its authority, or continue its violence against the subjects, with the subsequent collapse of the state into war (1988, 416-7).¹³⁸

Indignation therefore becomes the first common political affect, one in which the abused multitude share in each other's hatred and attempt to revenge themselves on their oppressor. For Matheron, it also has a socially regulative function, wherein the multitude's 'collective conatus' is realised through an affect that attempts to purge the state of a defective authority (1994b, 161-4; cf. 1982, 21-2). Bove also uses this collective conatus concept (1996, 257) to describe the multitude and resistance. He deepens Matheron's account of indignation by conceiving of it as one of two 'affects of resistance', that alongside benevolence, 'the desire to benefit one whom we pity' (1996, 291-5; cf. E3ad35), constitute the two affective keys of political life. Natural oscillations between oppression and

¹³⁷ An insight independently reached more recently in the social sciences through the concept of 'relative deprivation' and 'perceived injustice'. See Van Zomeren et al., 2008, 505-6.

¹³⁸ Sharp, 2013 reaches a similar conclusion on different lines, using Spinoza's recurring quote from Seneca, *violentia imperia nemo continuit diu* ('no-one has maintained a violent regime for long').

resistance function to ensure a dynamic equilibrium in social life and are the very process of its 'self-management' (1996, 301), with resistance to the civil power being an essential property of the citizen. This account of indignation still tends to regard politics in a way that is too *sub specie aeternitatis* however. What is to ensure an indignant multitude succeed in effectively transforming the state altogether so that one tyrant isn't merely replaced with another, or that collective indignation coheres around socially progressive and rational objectives (i.e. democratic, egalitarian) over reactive and xenophobic ones?

For Matheron, there is a 'democratic conatus' that the multitude share in through their interdependent relations, a dynamic and continually renewed consensus wherein all naturally seek their empowerment through the state (1997, 217), whatever form its placeholder takes. But the six definitions of servitude in §1.2.2 together furnish a robust observation as to why, without sufficient capability, this multitude will fight for the authorities which subjugate it. The liberation Matheron envisions this elusive democratic conatus resulting in take places only at the rarefied level of the mind(s). At the end of *Individu et communauté* he outlines a remarkable vision of a 'communism of minds' (1988, 612). Alongside pursuing generosity, prudence, gratitude, and obedience to the civil laws – the 'mundane' but socially necessary activities that reproduce the bourgeois liberal state – the philosopher actively works to 'enable all of Humanity to exist as a totality conscious of itself, a microcosm of the infinite Understanding, in the heart of which every soul, although remaining itself, would at the same time become all the others'. This communism of minds seeks to raise the entire human race to the level of collective self-awareness, with neither 'juridical laws nor institutional constraints' (612, n95), thereby seeing the total withering away of the state and a full 'communism of goods'. Knowledge of the third kind *is* collective, he indicates, because of its eternity and universality. Our collective awareness multiplies our knowledge of ourselves as individuals, and as interdependent participants in what Balibar identified as 'transindividuality' earlier in §3.6. In the process it surpasses 'all alienations and

divergences' on an affective level, as individuals come to recognise each other adequately as things of an 'interhuman' and common nature (613).

Matheron concludes that it also indicates the most complete liberation of the human mind alluded to by Spinoza, one that necessarily takes place on the collective level, 'a *complete and definitive* individual liberation in a community *without restriction*'. In a shared collective consciousness, a communism of minds, the individual overcomes the 'ultimate servitude', death. Matheron concedes that the communism of minds exists as an ideal, akin to the exemplar of the free man (§3.2.1), which humanity works towards without achieving. It functions 'as a regulative Idea in the Kantian sense' (1988, 612 n95), in that like Kant's God, immortality and free will in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the communism of minds does not constitute theoretical knowledge itself, but regulates and guides our thought and action towards an ideal limit.

It is one of the most beautiful interpretations of the politically liberatory Spinoza, and one can agree with Stolze that the Anglophone world has been so far cheated of Matheron's remarkable scholarship, still without systematic translation (2015, 153). Yet while effectively re-positioning collectivity as the focus of Spinoza's liberatory project, Matheron's journey towards this ideal limit is still unclear. The individual's liberation and ascension into a communism of minds may be possible for individuals or possibly even small groups, but what of the majority of humanity, rendered passive by poverty, ignorance and state violence?

Here one of Matheron's most attentive readers, Stolze, expands the account. If indignation against oppression is the 'first affective moment of resistance' (2014, 567), it remains insufficiently destabilising of the state's power and, as Bove indicates, merely renews its self-management. He then draws attention to a second affective moment of resistance, 'glory' which, like Bove's account of benevolence, enables a passive multitude to act more powerfully by imagining another praising their actions, and so behaving in ways

worthy of esteem (569). However this is also found to be unstable, as individuals experiencing glory do not necessarily produce socially useful actions. Militants must therefore strive towards a third affective moment of resistance, ‘fortitude’, and its accompanying active affects of courage and generosity (569-71).¹³⁹ Courage and generosity are reciprocal, binding people together in mutually useful relationships while enabling them to overcome sad passive affects like fear. Stolze then outlines an affective therapy for militants using E5p10s (cf. §2.5.2), where Spinoza issues in mnemonic form his ethical rules for living by directing us to understand the causes of the affects. By understanding the causes of indignation and glory in political oppression and disempowerment, militants can thereby strengthen ‘the affect of generosity through reflection on the usefulness of social solidarity’ (574).

Such an ethics of fortitude thereby serves two uses: it enables militants to recognise that there can be ‘no successful collective emancipation without the widespread participation of courageous and generous individuals’ (576), and so by implication, that militants should strive to enable as many as possible to become as courageous and generous as they can be. Secondly, it identifies the ‘internal struggle’ (577) of ethical practice as essential for militants alongside concrete political analysis – fortitude and ‘serenity of mind’ (cf. 2015, 164-5) can preserve intact a militant and their politics in a desperate political conjuncture long after indignation, vainglory and other passive affects lead to group burnout.

Both Matheron’s communism of minds and Stolze’s militant fortitude make great progress in transposing Spinoza’s ethics to political struggles, beyond those vague affirmations of joy, multitudes and reason criticised for their political uselessness earlier. Yet

¹³⁹ Before Stolze, Steinberg (2009, 48) offers a model of political *fortitudo*, a strength of mind that arises from a peaceful polity. But it is consequential to the orderly constitution of a reasonable republic, and like Spinoza’s own limited political prescriptions, gives no account of how such a republic is first established.

neither bridge the link between the individual's affective empowerment and self-knowledge and that fostered with small sympathetic affinity groups, with the wider social movements that cause tyrants to fall and states to change their form. Matheron's description of indignation supposes a kind of naturalistic probability that others will recognise each other's suffering, but this doesn't account for the prejudices and superstition described in Chapter 1 that result in popular servitude and the passive tolerance of inequality. Nor does a difficult-to-attain collective fortitude explain how resistance begins in the first place, before it can be sustained. Two problems remain: how individuals are able (or enabled) to recognise their common grievance in each other, a problem of ideology and hegemony; and how solidarity is sufficiently established so that the indignant can maintain their collective activity together (in contrast to merely cultivating a resilient *fortitudo* individually) against the violent forces of the tyrant.

§5.2.4 Critique of Revolution as Transcendental

The following two sections are dedicated to these problems, but I wish to highlight and scrutinise in passing a tendency in both Matheron and Stolze that is also found in other theorists of political resistance. This is the elevation of revolution to transcendence, such that communism or equivalent liberatory egalitarian politico-economic forms become an 'ideal' or 'regulative Idea' that thought and action are directed towards without ever reaching. Dean presents communism as a 'horizon' that is 'Real in the sense of *impossible* – we can never reach it' (2012, 2). For Bosteels, it is a politics 'without actuality', but one that conditions such an actuality, a reading he traces back to Sartre (2011, 228). Badiou similarly has presented communism as an idea possessing universal and emancipatory truth, one that is produced through events whose truth procedure consists in being founded on egalitarian axioms to which subjects must remain faithful (2005, 52-4). For Jameson, 'collective desire' is the material that supplies the 'content of Utopian form', if it is not to be found in the 'half-

forgotten trace of the experience of peasant solidarity and collectivity' (2005, 85). Even García Linera, vice-president of Bolivia's socialist government since 2006, describes communism both as 'the general horizon of the era' and yet not an 'immediate' one (in Bosteels, 2011, 226-7), one whose promise is heralded, then postponed. Granted, Marx and Engels already spell out this problem in the *German Ideology*, wherein they warn against setting up some 'ideal' or pragmatic 'state of affairs', in favour of a communism as 'the *real* movement which abolishes the present state of things' (1998, 57). But something of the activity of the verb *abolish* is lost in this talk. It is reminiscent of Kafka's parable "Before the law", that such a political transformation is 'possible... but not at the moment' (2005, 3).

There is something pragmatic in conceding the overwhelming historical and political forces that condition the present unlikelihood of international socialism. But the conceptions that frame the realism of that defeat, valid or not, disarm others from making something of their indignation. Raising revolution to such an ethereal plain devalues everyday struggles in the home or workplace, in actual or virtual public places, or at local or national government level. Here bonds of solidarity can be formed, sad passive affects checked and overcome with joyous ones, if not active ones, and individual and collective behaviours can be transformed *at least in part* so as to increase the intellectual and physical powers of others. These forms of individual and collective empowerment do matter and should not be discounted as mere lifestyle politics or reformism.

To discount the importance of everyday political struggles is to fall into the trap of 'Left melancholia' (Brown, 1999, 19-27; cf. Dean, 2012, 166-9), abandoning the initial premises of actual collective empowerment and retreating into a rarefied ideal, possible sometime after the end of history. Freud defines melancholia as the loss of a loved object, whose loss the individual mitigates by narcissistically identifying with its own ego, and internalising it as its very subjectivity (or *ethos*). 'In this way an object loss was transformed

into an ego-loss and the conflict between the ego and the loved person into a cleavage between the critical activity of the ego and the ego as altered by identification' (Freud, 2001, 243). Anger against the lost object is directed at the ego itself, leading to debilitating depression and inaction, interrupted by occasional bursts of splenetic re-commitment to the loved object. The means of resolving the conflict would be to recognise and grieve the lost object, i.e. international socialism and its revolutionary realisation – or recognise that such an object is by no means lost at all, and that its possession is not subjective but intrinsically collective.

Though Stolze goes some way to outline an individual ethics of fortitude, at best this only assists us in our singular ability to resist, rather than our collective capacity to revolt. It is apt that he draws on Critchley in discussing anger as the 'first political emotion' (Stolze, 2014, 567; Critchley, 2008, 130). Critchley's ethics of political resistance is premised entirely on disappointment, that 'we inhabit a violently *unjust* world' whose 'hard reality' we must face up to (2008, 3-5). Resistance therefore consists in the non-violent creation of an 'interstitial distance from the state' in which critique and the vague construction of new political subjectivities is undertaken, under the premise that the impoverished global proletariat is no longer a relevant historical actor (2008, 91, 124, 132). What this 'interstitial critique' and 'infinite demands on the state' actually involve is not clear, but Critchley provides a firmer foundation for it in a separate discussion of Kierkegaard and religious faith, wherein it is 'the faithless who can best sustain the rigor of faith without requiring security, guarantees, and rewards' (2012, 252). The problem is tangentially illuminated when Del Lucchese equates political resistance with 'life' itself (2009, 42): in both, resistance becomes a living force and ethical outlook premised on resignation, wherein revolution becomes the stuff of disappointed faith, a means of ethical perseverance in an evil world.

This unfortunate premise also grounds Caygill's otherwise excellent study of political resistance, wherein 'the capacity to resist' is made 'distinct from the revolutionary project of realizing freedom' (2013, 146). Caygill distrusts its pragmatic ends-driven nature, preferring a disillusioned and vitalistic resistance of *energeia* that opposes all forms of domination (20, 208). In its rarefied, politically detached form, resistance is a 'vital capacity' of life over death and an 'empowering non-violent interruption of these routines of evil' (119-20). Resistance therefore becomes academic, a form of quietism, or at best only a question of the subject's endurance in the world. Being 'merely driven by matter's aimless energy' in an unruly world, such quietism might find more solace in the work of pessimistic philosopher and Thatcherite John Gray, abandoning the dream of collective struggle as the road to Stalinist serfdom, and retreating into the safe solipsism of 'inner freedom' (2015, 163-5). Indeed, why maintain political beliefs at all, if individual freedom and life is all one can truly count on? Berlant helpfully defines as 'cruel optimism' (2011, 1-2) those desires and attachments that actually impede one's happiness and flourishing. Like her examples of overeating, filial duty or participation in the broken forms of a sham representative democracy, might the project of collective power and revolution merely be a 'fantasy' and optimistic attachment that enables us to persist in a passive state under neoliberal capitalism (cf. 11-4, 224-6)? In this case, Caygill's endorsement of disillusion need not be so disillusioning.

For those brutalised by capitalism, religious bigotry, police violence, patriarchy and racism, or determined to express solidarity with and defend those who are, one needs more than ethical persistence. There remains a need for a political theory that indicates how commonly-held grievances can be manifested in collective forms that become powerful and empowering, transforming repressive social institutions and retaking state power from the grip of these forces. Fortunately there is a means of overcoming these debilitating

consequences, drawing a line out of the impasse of ethical resistance towards a thinking of collective power.

§5.2.5 Emulation

Earlier, I indicated that there were two textual problems with Matheron's account of indignation. Accounting for those briefly will enable an introduction to the possibility of collective activity. The first concerns fear. It is not strictly consistent with Spinoza to claim that the subject will react to the tyrant's violence, which causes her/him fear, with anger and hatred. As Spinoza argues, it is fear of isolation that compels a subject to ally with others in a civil state, and a common fear shared that, like hope, enables a multitude to think as if by one mind (TP 3.3; 3.8; 6.1-2). Fear, like hope, is more likely to condition obedience. The second concerns the passive affects. Being not only a passive affect but also a sad affect, indignation can only cause harm to the subject who experiences it: E4p51 states that it is an 'evil' and a cause of further passivity, and 4p73 finds no place for it in the life of the individual guided by reason. At the same time, 4p54 remarks that while the passive sad affects of 'repentance' and 'humility' are not virtues but failures to adequately grasp one's power and desire, they serve a socially instrumental use. Given that in Spinoza's schema those who live according to the dictates of reason are very few indeed, 'since men must sin, they ought rather to sin in that direction' (4p54s). Of course, no-one willingly elects this affective pair. Instead it is through prophets who, having 'considered the common advantage', commend these affects, alongside hope and fear, because those who are 'subject to these affects can be guided far more easily... [to] live from the guidance of reason'.

Indignation is not one of these affects (nor is it, technically, one of the imitative affects given). While it may serve a politically instrumental use in establishing solidarity and energising insurrectionaries to topple a tyrant and change the state's form, there is nothing about it that will necessarily foster a sense of collectivity beyond the point of observing the

injury to another we judge of like nature. It leads precisely to the ‘imprudence’ of the English, discussed earlier. Once the injury ends, so does the indignation, and so the insurrectionaries theoretically return home, possibly repentant. Instead I would like to argue that there is another affect of resistance that may animate our politics of collective desire, without the textual or political problems above, and that is *emulation*. It is defined as ‘a desire for a thing which is generated in us because we imagine that others have the same desire’ (E3ad33; cf. 3p27s). It is also one of the imitative affects, but specifically imitates what is judged to be ‘honourable, useful or pleasant’. Emulation emerges from the primary affect of desire (3p11s), and so is neither joyous nor sad, but the only affect of desire that is also imitative (cf. Macherey, 1998, 392-405). Imagining others sharing the same desire results in ‘undoing the divide between ego-centrism and altruism’ as Read puts it, revealing the necessarily relational or, for him, transindividual, nature of the affects (2016, 30-1; cf. Matheron, 1988, 164). While we can caution against reaching the tenuous conclusion that emulation is intrinsically empowering – the desire we imagine could be a harmful one, or we might seek to repress a given desire to conform with others with reactionary beliefs – emulation redirects attention to the fundamental role of the imagination in forging lastingly powerful collectives. If we emulate what we judge to be of a common nature, then the question for a project of collective empowerment becomes how we extend our imagination of what is common with us, our *commonality* (cf. §3.4).

Spinoza provides no ready answer here, though the proximate affects offer more illumination. If someone affects another judged like us with joy, we are affected with love towards them, that is, joy accompanied by the idea of an external cause (3p27c1; 3p13c). Inversely, if this same person affects another like us in a way that causes them suffering, we are affected with sadness for the victim, and hatred for this person (3p27c2-3, drawing on 3p22s). This sadness compels us to ‘free a thing we pity from its suffering’, resulting either in the destruction of this person, or another desire to do a good for the thing we pity, which

Spinoza calls 'benevolence' (3p27s2), one of Bove's affects of resistance earlier. Indeed, as Spinoza outlines, our internal affective structure is most often defined by our relations to those around us. We strive to accomplish whatever we imagine others to look on with joy, which leads to 'ambition' (3p29s); and if we believe that our actions have caused others joy, we experience 'self-esteem' (3p30s). If we imagine others loving, desiring or hating the same object in the same way that we do, we experience our own affect with greater intensity and constancy (3p31), and by the same token, the greater the affect by which we imagine a thing we love to be affected toward us, the greater joy or self-esteem we ourselves experience (3p34s).

One can begin to identify some foundations for a project of collective empowerment through the affects: by emulation we desire a common good, because we imagine others like ourselves desiring it. In extending our concept of a common nature towards as many as we can, we feel love for those who bring joy to our friends, and in expressing this love, thereby increase our circle of friends. We pity and defend our friends who are injured, benevolently seeking to restore their power, and possibly revenging those who have injured them as our enemies. Our ambitious desire to accomplish things that cause others joy, that is, which empowers them, will also lead to a feeling of self-esteem when we recognise our worth in enabling others. And when we imagine our friends loving and desiring the same ideas and activities that we do, we love them with even greater constancy, renewing our commitment and solidarity in this collective flourishing.

However, there is nothing yet to prevent emulation becoming envy (3p22), ambition leading to mutual strife or possessive greed (3p31-p32), and love or desire from being disappointed or spurned (3p35), returning us back to solipsism, isolation and ethical resistance. It is remarkable then that whereas Spinoza earlier praised prophets for deploying the sad affects of repentance and humility to make others live by the guidance of reason,

that he did not write of the joyous affects they are paired with also being deployed for prophetic purpose. Where repentance is first defined, it is merely the saddened obverse of 'self-esteem', that is, 'joy accompanied by the idea of an internal cause' (3p30s). Likewise, whereas humility is sadness 'accompanied by the idea of our own weakness' (3p55s1), joy accompanied by our power of acting is 'self-love' or, again, 'self-esteem'. Yet Spinoza then claims that our observation of another's power of acting inclines us to hate or envy them unless we judge them either as an equal or irredeemably superior to us (3p55s2). If we venerate another because of their prudence and strength of character, this is only because we cannot imagine their virtues to be of a nature common with ours, 'any more than we envy trees their height, or lions their strength'.¹⁴⁰

In my view, it is unfortunate that Spinoza does not consider his active affects (3p59s) of fortitude, courage and generosity as necessarily encouraging of others to emulate them. Had he done so, he might have presented an account of the prophet who does not merely mobilise through sad passive affects like fear, repentance and humility (cf. §3.3). Such a prophet would draw on the affective powers of self-esteem, courage, generosity, fortitude, the cultural processes underlying commonality, and the passive affects of ambition, pity, love and emulation, and would thereby empower a community more than the prophet who merely mobilises through sadness. As Spinoza deduces, joy is stronger than sadness in that it involves passing to a state of greater power (3p21), while knowledge alone is insufficient to overcome the affects – only a stronger affect can overcome an existing one (4p7, 4p14, 4p18).

¹⁴⁰ Given Spinoza's meticulous attention to the detail of his own argument, the example of the lion's strength alludes to the analogy of TTP 16.3, wherein human beings are 'no more obliged to live by the laws of a sound mind than a cat is by the laws of a lion's nature'.

However an impasse lies ahead, for according to Spinoza prophets succeed in mobilising individuals of only national similarity.¹⁴¹ But the prophet does not possess divine power in the conventional sense: they are simply mortals with the capability of grasping reasonable ways of living, which they then relay to other individuals through the persuasive means of the affects and imagination in a way the majority can understand (cf. TTP Pref.10; 2.9). By implication, anyone capable of persuading others to live peacefully and cooperatively together through affective, symbolic or imaginary registers that they can not only grasp but come to incorporate as their own – thereby recognising their own common nature and refusing to tolerate external oppression – might be termed a prophet. The means of educating the desire of individuals to extend commonality, emulate what is best in others, act and think as a collective group with each other, and then act as if by one mind according to reason, remains otherwise unaccounted for in Spinoza. Therefore I now turn to more recent writings of collective power and interdependence beyond Spinoza and his readers. In the process, I will reconstruct ethical reason and political practice as two attributes of the same project for empowerment, being an individual and collective endeavour.

§5.3 Collective Desire

Earlier, Dean's notion of the communist 'horizon' as an unreachable limit was introduced. Dean's argument is premised on the more interesting claim that the contemporary Left's ineffectiveness stems from its abandonment of collectivity. 'The absence of a common program or vision is generally lamented', she writes, but this absence actually stems from 'the loss of a Left that says "we" and "our" and "us" in the first place' (2012, 54). In refusing the language of collectivity and denying its possibility, the Left falls into a melancholia wherein its other collectivist – and in her analysis, therefore necessarily communist projects

¹⁴¹ Exceptions might be made for Jesus Christ or the Apostles, but in the TTP Spinoza reserves special and distinct status to them compared to other prophets (with good expedient reasons) – see TTP 4.10 and §3.5.

– are no longer possible. The political subject is instead considered fragmented into a ‘multitude of singularities’, whose procedural and ‘democratic preoccupations with process and participation’ effectively acquiesce with capitalism while acting as a brake on the fury of the downtrodden (58-9).

Dean is one of the first to deploy the term ‘collective desire’ in a sense beyond simply indicating the preference of a particular group.¹⁴² Having earlier argued that only a communist project would be capable of abolishing capitalism and establishing global institutions of ‘egalitarian cooperation’ (11), she asserts an unwittingly Spinozan case that the people’s sovereignty alone ‘names the cause and reason for government: the collective people in their desire for a common good’ (104). This collective desire is necessarily ‘communist desire’ (190), in that it seeks freedom without recourse to authority in the strength of the community. ‘Collectivity is the form of desire in two senses: our desire and *our desire for us*; or, communist desire is the collective desire for collective desiring’ (199; cf. Dean, 2016, 235). This account of collective desire indicates how the ‘people’ become an effective and liberatory political subject through their common activity and willing. A shared desire unites them, one that is egalitarian and also universalising, and which exceeds those external determinations that would otherwise render them passive. In this way their activity is in their collectivity, their communist desire striving for its own realisation as ‘desiring’, as the end of the last quotation indicates.

Paradoxically, there is a consistently anti-democratic tone to Dean’s argument, one that is troubling. Early on, those critical of communism’s actual historical legacy are

¹⁴² Using Google’s NGram viewer, one can find the first published use of the term ‘collective desire’ in 1816 to a tract on population and its deleterious economic effects in Ireland (James Grahame, *An Enquiry into the principle of population*). The use of the term thereafter is piecemeal and irregular, usually connoting a group’s shared preference. However one early use of the term is pertinent for the direction of this chapter. In a study of Algerian magic of 1909, Doutté describes mythic imaginings of gods as ‘the collective desire personified’, a personification not of natural forces but of social ones. See Cassirer, 1946, 280.

dismissed as ‘liberal democrats, and probably a threat that must be suppressed’ (7-8, without irony), and the regular attacks on the Left throughout the book often censure concerns with democratic process, local struggles and identity politics, a ‘democratic drive’ that inhibits ‘revolutionary desire’ (174; cf. 2016, 54-5 which continues this attack against ‘left realism’).¹⁴³ If these were attached to a critique of individualising ideology, social inequality within Left organisations, or the ‘cruel optimism’ (Berlant, 2011) of a faith in a corrupted representative democracy then perhaps they might succeed, but they are not. Instead they suggest an intemperate dissatisfaction with the very form most conducive to the expression of desires and amenable to egalitarian common decisions, being an adequately-constituted democracy that enables the capabilities of as many of its members as possible to think for themselves.

Further, Dean attempts a conception of the political subject as ‘the people as the *rest of us*’ (2012, 69), one that eschews the historical baggage of terms like ‘proletariat’ and ‘working class’ as the basis of this collectivity in favour of a more antagonistic and interruptive notion, but which also allows for a flexible generality in who this subject incorporates (79-80). But such a form suffers the same vagueness as ‘indignation’ earlier, in that there is nothing about this *rest of us*, later allied to the ‘99%’ project of Occupy (200-1), that will think and act in ways conducive to political change. Desiring itself is not liberatory – as §1.3 argued, groups can be affectively manipulated into desiring what harms their interests. Curiously, as Chapter 2 noted, accounts of desire in Spinoza have almost always tended to focus on its ontological foundation in the *conatus* – *as if desire were merely conatus* – rather than the facet presented in E3p9s, that one desires *what is judged a good*

¹⁴³ This is a peculiar feature of Dean’s argument rather than the observation of a trend. See Kouvelakis (2003, 303-5) on the centrality of democracy to Marx’s project. Notably Kouvelakis raises whether Marx was a Spinozist, and develops a pro-democracy argument like that of §4.5.2. Against Kouvelakis, I claim that Spinoza (and by extension, Marx) does not embed ‘democracy’ (in the sense they understood it) as the centre of political power, but rather popular sovereignty, what we called in the previous chapter *collective right*.

by a dispositional network of ideas (being affects, imagination, and some common notions: §2.4). Bringing Spinoza's insight forward into this discussion, we are forced to question the normative, if not teleological supposition of Dean that the '*rest of us*' will desire and revolt in a politically progressive, adequately 'revolutionary' manner.

It is the same problem as that of emulation: how does one come to judge what is a good, or of a common nature? Social judgement, as §3.5 indicated with the case of the universal faith, takes place at the level of the imagination and affects. There is nothing about a 99% or other large number, the definition of 'multitude' in Spinoza, that means it will necessarily seek its liberation in democratic, egalitarian forms of cooperation, particularly if it has been conditioned by fear and ignorance, and subjugated by poverty and insecure labour, to either distrust such collectives or exploit them for self-interested ends. Dean's uncritical call for a Leninist party to represent the crowds and infuse it with 'discipline and preparation' (2012, 241; cf. 2016, 264) risks divesting individuals of the responsibility they must bear for their own mental and physical liberation, and that of others around them. It indicates a problem that I address in §5.5.3: such a party would be in danger of replacing one tyrant with another, exchanging neoliberal oligarchy for the bureaucratic, authoritarian and seemingly anti-democratic party. While Dean's attention to collective desire is therefore useful, it does not detail how such a desire becomes communist and collective, and how the individual's desire becomes a desire for freedom. In the following sub-sections I will develop and refine this problem as one of consciousness (§5.3.1) and individualism (§5.3.2), the extent to which a collective is defined as an individual (§5.3.3), and offer a solution through interdependence (§5.3.4).

§5.3.1 Consciousness of Oppression

Following Caygill, one could call collective desire a problem of 'consciousness' (2013, 139): how an individual or a group becomes conscious of its intrinsic power, and the forces that

limit this power. While Caygill is sceptical of valorising consciousness as an end in itself in becoming freer, Lukács presents a more instrumental account of *becoming conscious* as a stage in collective political mobilisation. In a discussion of Lenin's practical and theoretical mastery of a calamitous conjuncture, he observes that the 'the vague and abstract concept of 'the people' had to be rejected, but only so that a revolutionary, discriminating, concept of 'the people' – *the revolutionary alliance of the oppressed* – could develop' (2009, 22-3). It redefined a vague Enlightenment notion into the more affectively concrete form of the oppressed: a category of individuals brutalised by poverty and hunger amid the war and violence of the Tsarist state, which could easily recognise themselves *as* and others *of* the oppressed. The nature of their material oppression forced them into an alliance that was by nature revolutionary, given the forces of repression against it, but which also then established the grounds for a higher form of dialectical class consciousness, beyond an earlier and merely empirical consciousness concerned with superficial aspects of objective reality (1971, 177-81). Hence '*only the practical class consciousness of the proletariat possesses this ability to transform things*' (205). The emergence of their class consciousness is akin to an individual becoming self-determining in their desire in Spinoza. Where once they were only a passive and inadequate cause of their action or thought, in coming to recognise (via the assistance of others) the nature of the desire and its effects, they acquired a new understanding of this desire, and a new activity and corresponding joy in realising this desire by themselves.

The argument is akin to Dean's emphasis on collective desire emerging through joint activity considered earlier, and one encounters similar arguments of class power as self-conscious action in Sartre (1968, 89) and, more recently, Hallward (2009, 22-23). The question remains how individuals become conscious of their common nature and act in solidarity. Here Lukács is insightful. As he argues, such a class consciousness (like that of the revolutionary alliance of the oppressed) can only succeed in realising itself and becoming

revolutionary when it overcomes the ideological fetters of individualism. It is a matter of desire – one that seeks to transcend ‘the immediacy of empirical reality’ (1971, 162) into a communist collective unity. Towards the end of *History and Class Consciousness*, he argues that the ‘conscious desire for the realm of freedom’ is one that necessarily entails ‘consciously taking the steps that will really lead to it’ (315). Yet this is not a freedom of the isolated individual, for in ‘contemporary bourgeois society individual freedom can only be corrupt and corrupting because it is a case of unilateral privilege based on the unfreedom of others’, through unequal relations of private property. This conscious desire therefore renounces individual freedom as presently offered, embracing instead an interdependent and communal identity that makes a ‘reality’ of the freedom of the individual, in empowering all collectively. Such a freedom requires the ‘conscious subordination of the self to that collective will’ (ibid.).

I find Lukács’ formulation remarkable, indicating a politics of collective power rooted in a common consciousness of oppression. It is akin to Matheron’s assessment of indignation, but overcomes its limitations through this proposal of a revolutionary *alliance* – a term with more flexibility than collective, in that it can incorporate a diversity of individuals with differing capacities and interests into a more temporary common cause. This alliance aids individuals expressing solidarity to realise the more fundamental conditions of their oppression, and reasonably embrace their common nature. It also attacks aloof egoism and attachment to notions of bourgeois individuality, established in property rights, as necessarily inhibiting the thinking of collectivity, by which individuals become more powerful and free through their mutual assistance. But Lukács baldly states that ‘[t]his conscious collective will is the Communist party’ (315-6); one finds a similar assertion of collective will as the actually-existing Communist party in Gramsci, with a shared emphasis

on 'discipline' and conformity of thought (2000, 32-4). In the context of the early 1920s, such formulations can be understood, but serve less use in different conjunctures.¹⁴⁴

§5.3.2 Problem of Individualism

The critique of one's affective experience of one's individuality, or selfhood, as an ideological construct that inhibits collective power, remains pertinent. Though formulated more opaquely, Benjamin's remarks on collectivity enable a firmer grasp of a problem encountered in our earlier account of voluntary servitude and enlistment (§1.2). In *The Arcades Project*, Benjamin introduces a discussion of the nineteenth century by characterising it as a 'singular fusion of individualistic and collectivist tendencies'. Yet as it transpires, the former concept is largely phantasmagorical, and the latter fundamental. Unlike all previous eras, 'it labels all actions 'individualistic' while subterraneanly, in despised everyday domains, it necessarily furnishes, as in a delirium, the elements of collective formation' (Benjamin, 1999 390; cf. Buck-Morss, 1991, 121-5). One could say that this concept of individualism is a 'superstition', like that assessed in §1.2: it provides a false belief about self-autonomy in a necessarily social and interdependent world, one that actually harms the subject by compelling them to beliefs about their own self-sufficiency and egotistic good, at the expense of nurturing relations that would actually realise their happiness.

Benjamin notes Tocqueville's observation that a more individualistic a people, the less varied its culture (1999, 390), but the significance of this insight becomes clearer in his writings on Baudelaire. Here Benjamin sketches a concept of 'collective desire' as something seeking to transcend the 'deficiencies of the social order of production', one that attempts

¹⁴⁴ The emphasis on such discipline and conformity of party direction has been used to subdue dissenting voices in radical groups, like those of feminists and people of colour, as well as conceal the abuses of party leaders, and is rightly an unpalatable doctrine in the current era. This problem of conformity, organisation and collective will – and Gramsci's later return to it – are explored in the following sections.

to defeat the promise of the 'new' by commodifying it (2006, 32). Against this individualising, commodifying imperative, Benjamin identifies a revolutionary concept of a latent collectivity and its desire, which takes the form of 'images in the collective consciousness', of a memory of the ancient past which releases hope for a utopian future, 'in which the new is permeated with the old', and in which primal history furnishes the possibility of a return to a classless society, and a call for a collectivity to come' (cf. Lunn, 1982, 162-3; Gelley, 2015, xii).

Yet one does not otherwise find a political outline of this concept of collectivity in Benjamin. It provokes a furious response from Adorno. In a letter to him dated 2nd August 1935, Adorno attacks it as a quasi-Jungian 'archaic collective ego' (in Lunn, 1982, 165; the influence of Durkheim goes uncommented on). The historical subject that would transcend capitalism, the proletariat, finds itself recast as a dream. Adorno's difficulty with Benjamin's conception and critique of individualism reveals a broader fissure in the thinking of collectivity. We can agree with Dean that the project of collective empowerment is essential for the individual's freedom and for building effective political movements – our conclusions about unanimity from the previous two chapters cannot lead us otherwise. Therefore establishing ways for individuals to recognise their common nature with others and act in solidarity is of primary concern. Lukács emphasised the priority of building a collective consciousness, and also indicated that an alliance of the oppressed can help organise the isolated and indignant into a mutually strengthening bond. Both Lukács and Benjamin also indicated that this alliance (or party) would only succeed by attempting to divest individuals of their individualist self-perceptions, socially produced by bourgeois capitalism to increase consumption. But as Adorno asked of Benjamin above, to what extent can a collective act and think as an individual? Is this collective power merely a declarative ruse to assemble individuals around a common political force, or is there in actuality a universal and eternal plane in which all can participate in as a collective unity, in what Matheron envisioned as a

‘communism of minds’? To reckon with this claim, I now turn to another more recent study of collective individuation to evaluate these difficulties.

§5.3.3 Open-ended Collective Individuation

This question of the identity of the collective political subject is reminiscent of a controversy in Spinoza studies, introduced in §3.2.2. To what extent does Spinoza conceive the well-functioning and reasonable state as a collective individual, possessing one body and mind? After all, while reflecting on man’s utility to man, he adds that for the sake of our self-preservation, we should strive that ‘all should so agree in all things that the minds and bodies of all would compose, as it were, one mind and one body’ (E4p18s). This language is regularly reprised in the *Political Treatise*, wherein a state’s right is ‘determined by the power of a people that is guided as though by a single mind’ (TP 3.7).

As we argued, Spinoza’s conception of a unanimous collective individual is best understood as a description of the relative power of a given community of individuals. It is not merely a metaphor or counterfactual name for the state (contra McShea, 1969; Gueroult, 1974, 170 n78; Den Uyl, 1983, 71; Rice, 1990; Barbone, 2002), nor is the state by essence a collective individual with a conatus (contra Matheron, 1988, 346; and to a lesser extent Zac, 1963, 225-6; Sacksteder, 1984; Bove, 1996, 257). Rather, it presents a theoretical lens to understand social organisation in a new aspect, one in which individuals guided by reason (hence of one mind) recognise and extend their commonality, develop nurturing, cooperative and consequently joyous relations with each other, enabling one and all to think and act to the greatest extent they can. However, as Chapter 3 also concluded, the concept of ‘one mind’ remains vague and so lends itself to multiple interpretations. Instead of becoming further mired in hermeneutic reconstruction, a more open model of collective individuation itself might merit more fruitful excavation. It is my premise that this concept

can help illuminate what so far remains an unclear definition of collective political subjectivity.

J. Gilbert has recently argued for a politics of ‘creative multiplicity’ (2014, 210) that is rooted in collective forms of social life. Whereas Dean uses collectivity to reinvigorate Leftist thought, Gilbert wields it against the hegemonic forces of neoliberalism, wherein a contemporary individualist malaise has rendered ‘the isolated, competitive individual... the basic unit of human experience’ (2014, viii). His account envisions a form of collectivity defined by its diversity, creativity, horizontality and intrinsic sociality, one that embraces ‘the fluidity and complexity of contemporary forms of belonging and identification’ (29; cf. 92, 97-8, 210-5). It is an open-ended collective individuality, with a dynamic if vague nature.

Gilbert’s argument rests on two suppositions. The first, positive, defines subjectivity as something constituted by our relations, or ‘field of relationality’ (108). Drawing on a vertiginous set of sources, though primarily Simondon’s transindividuality and Arendt’s ‘boundless action’, the subject exists among ‘various events and processes of ‘individuation’, which are never fully complete’ (108). There is no such thing as the individual as an atomic and self-sufficient unit. ‘[E]very person is born into a set of social relations which pre-exist them and which at least partially define the very possibility of their biological existence’ (34), Gilbert insists, in terms Spinoza would agree with (cf. §3.2.1). Instead one should appreciate the collective forms of individuation that make life possible and enjoyable. This requires embracing a general condition of ‘creative possibility’ and ‘infinite relationality’ that defines human sociality (108-12; cf. 210-6).

It is an inclusive and hopeful argument, one that this thesis is sympathetic to, and one which I have presented here as an alternative route to collectivity without the restrictiveness that unanimity connotes – the kind of open-ended collectivity that Lukács’ term ‘alliance’ promised earlier. But it still leaves us with no account of how such an individuation occurs.

As with Dean, it rejects concepts like 'proletariat' (e.g. 29) for a vague form of fluid collectivity, whose empirical forms include peer-to-peer sharing on the Internet and world social forums, whose relevance as effective liberatory media has been found lacking in more recent years. In an era riven by fear, growing nationalisms, and the private enclosure of the Internet commons by multinational technology companies, Gilbert does not indicate how popular forms of collective solidarity can be built among fearful and dispossessed peoples.¹⁴⁵

Some of these problems are already there in Marx and Engels' own formulation of the *real* movement of communism, alighted on earlier, and which bears a profound influence on the authors we consider in this section. They note that the division of labour is not possible without the community, for '[o]nly within the community has each individual the means of cultivating his gifts in all directions', and therefore 'personal freedom becomes possible only within the community' (1998, 86). Whereas individuals have hitherto formed an 'illusory community' in the state and relations of private property, Marx and Engels envision a 'community of revolutionary proletarians' (89) in which individuals participate 'as individuals' rather than mere 'members of a class'. Once again, there is wondrous promise in the abolition and overturning of 'all earlier relations of production and intercourse' (ibid; cf. 51-4) they herald, and Spinoza's republic of reason shares in this rationale of beginning politics again.¹⁴⁶ But we are still faced with the same problem, and one which we will discuss with Gramsci in the following section: how does one overpower the imaginings and affects of a very powerful existing illusory community, with a new collective imaginary and political

¹⁴⁵ In §5.4 I present Gramsci's formulations of hegemony and common sense as a more effective means of confronting this problem, and in §5.6 consider how Reich raises the problem of fascism and authoritarian populism, and a more promising affective means of overcoming it.

¹⁴⁶ See also the *Communist Manifesto*: 'In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.' (2008, 66). Marx is known to have copied out extensive passages of the TTP – *Cahiers Spinoza* I reproduces these with an excellent commentary by Matheron (1977) on the young Marx's interest in its apparent dichotomy between democracy and theocracy (cf. Kouvelakis, 2003, 415).

reason that appears to one's would-be fellow revolutionary proletarians as an even more illusory utopia?

Gilbert's argument offers something approaching a response to this difficult question. This is the second supposition of his I wish to identify, a negative one though more original than the first, and one which dominates his claims. It identifies a tradition of 'possessive individualism' that begins in the contractualism of Hobbes and proceeds through Locke's re-foundation of the political order on private property, to the current era which he calls a 'Leviathan logic' (36-44). This possessive individualism underscores a western outlook founded on private property, competition and mutual suspicion, leading to the contemporary mantra of *homo economicus* and neoliberal market models imposed on education, healthcare and other basic social institutions. It conceives all social relations being 'vertical', between an isolated individual and a central sovereign authority, with broader society being constituted by other competitive individuals who seek to limit one's freedom (50, 69-70). Such a worldview therefore devalues society and inhibits the possibility of cooperation and solidarity across social groups. These possessive individualist conceptions have also tended to impose the properties of a human individual on group behaviours, almost always irrational ones. From Plato's dismissal of democracy to Freud's account of group psychology as primarily hierarchical yet irrational, and Le Bon's assessment of crowds as electively ignorant and 'preferring to deify error', the intersecting dynamics of the collective are rubbished and reduced to the mania, fickleness and violence of mobs and masses (51-6; cf. Le Bon, 1995, 132). For Gilbert, any project of collectivity must avoid repeating these 'meta-individual' descriptions of collective groups which serve only to discredit and diminish them.

Collectivity can be a foundation of empowerment, but it is not necessarily empowering. As relations between individuals are always in variance, there is no hard or fast

collectivist method for establishing a common imaginary or reason with which to overcome the forces of political servitude. Like Spinoza's three political forms in §4.5, we must instead recognise the different facets of a given conjuncture to identify how collective empowerment can be realised. In order to not merely theorise collective political subjectivities but – emulating Spinoza – develop models of possible political use, it is necessary to recognise oneself as already collectively constituted and of the collective, defined by one's interdependent relations with others. At the same time, it suggests divesting as best as one can one's attachment to the individual, subjective ego as some kind of self-contained atomic fact. This is the thesis that the individual *is* collective, intimated across the thesis (e.g. §2.6.5, §3.2, §4.3) and returned to in the Conclusion. To explore how individuals exist among others in a collective, I turn to the final conceptual problem of this section on collective desire.

§5.3.4 Interdependence

The difficulties of interdependence can be understood through another interlocutor, Sartre, who I turn to in this sub-section in order to complete my account of the concept of collective desire, divined in Spinoza and expanded on here in its potential uses for contemporary political theory. In his posthumously published *Notebooks for an Ethics*, Sartre observes that the individual becomes '*conscious* of society' only to the extent that it 'falls outside him' (1992, 110). Society has a concrete objective form constituted through the gaze of the individual as that which is outside him but serves an instrumental function, and through the gaze of others who recognise the individual as a social agent (110-1). The individual can either ground themselves into social relations (as a 'proletariat') or refuse them outright (as a 'Jew', so he writes).

Sartre attempts to explain this by comparison to Spinoza, but his misunderstanding of a mode's immanent power indicates the wider problem I seek to illustrate. He writes that 'I

am like a thought that is isolated from a consciousness while remaining in consciousness or, more precisely, I am like Spinoza's mode that never re-joins the substance from which it emanates' (112). But modes in Spinoza do not emanate from substance nor are they alienated from it: they are immanent realisations of its power. They therefore cannot exist in a transcendent relation to it, being unable to rejoin it, for they already always participate in it and constitute it, even if finitely. Indeed Spinoza dissolves the subjective/objective distinction upon which Sartre's ethics of the I/Other is premised. One's affects and desire are already constituted by one's upbringing, socialisation and education, one's physical markers and the contingent social identifications these carry, one's daily relations with others, and one's passivity or activity in relation to external forces.

Yet Sartre's conception of collectivity otherwise enables a thinking of the kind of subjectivity it produces. He asserts that a 'collective idea is one of the unifying structures of a given collectivity' (1992, 113). It implies dependence on others, and cannot be rationally intuited by individual, isolated members. It becomes 'social when others are its guarantee'. Giving the example of a political journalist who sets out to articulate 'public opinion', there exists an 'internal objectivity' of collective thought which the journalist expresses as an idea. The idea 'will be *true* if it really brings about the unitary fusion of consciousness', being 'the potential unity of the group, having become what it was' (114). Such a unity is constituted through an interdependent, mutually constituting relation of gazes: the individual feels the 'collective value of the idea' when she/he is 'looked at by *another* who has this idea ... and who looks at me as the expression of the whole' or collective. In this way, 'the collective idea is never thought by anyone' (115) but exists through its recognition as a relation between others of a like-minded and common nature. In this way, 'I realize the collective desire, I give body to it' (116). One actualises the collective desire in being an objective part of it.

Sartre's subjectivist foundation for this marks the limitations of imagining oneself as somehow apart from the collective, upon which all manner of meta-individual values is imposed. Yet his account of collectivity as one's awareness of one's common nature in one's interdependent relations with others (what I term *commonality*, e.g. §3.2) is pertinent, for it locates collectivity in the strength of our relations. As Gilbert and Dean have differently indicated, our sense of collectivity is not a natural fact but becomes realised through our cooperative activity towards a shared end (what I term *becoming-collective*, e.g. §3.7). Lukács and Benjamin draw attention to the consciousness that accompanies this activity. It is a form of constituent power (cf. Del Lucchese, 2015), but one premised on interdependent and egalitarian relations within a common political project. It therefore comes into being through indignation, awareness of others' suffering, determining a common cause, solidarity, emulation and rebellion.

In this way we can appreciate Camus's remark that 'In order to exist, man must rebel, but rebellion must respect the limit it discovers in itself – a limit where minds meet and, in meeting, begin to exist' (1991, 22). Rebellion is not premised on totality or universal truths; it cannot know whether it will succeed (but necessarily hopes that it does). The rebel 'prefers the 'We are' to the 'We shall be'' (281-282), because the latter devalues the present in its appeal to a universal truth or unrealised epoch, thereby tyrannising in the name of the cause, and so forfeiting its ethical legitimacy and collective support (281-282). It refuses transcendence in favour of immanence, where the means *are* the ends. Suffering is discovered to be a 'collective experience' which, in luring us from our solitude, enables our self-awareness. 'I rebel – therefore we exist' (22).

Tones of Camus's dictum echo in the recent work of biologist Kriti Sharma, who closes her discussion of interdependence in nature with 'I am because we are' (2015, 130). Her work presents a useful companion to Gilbert's critique of possessive individualism explored

earlier in this section, and will help round up this discussion of a dynamic interdependence constituting the core of the collective political subject. In an analysis of signal cell transduction, Sharma presents the thesis that identity is '*mutually constituted*'. Like Gilbert, she commences from the common-sense premise that self-sufficiency (or what Gray earlier praised as 'inner freedom') is a delusion, that individuals cannot exist in isolation, and instead that one emerges in an already existing world whose relations and structures enable one to survive. From a cellular level, complex organisms like flowers or human beings are comprised of a vast number of diverse parts, cooperating on the basic level of signal and response, which often come in and out of existence or contact with our body (2015, 6-10, 22-5).¹⁴⁷ Our cognitive processes or 'folk essentialism' (12) present objects as coherent, independent unities, but these, like even one's sense of selfhood, *cogito ergo sum*, are themselves perceptions. Indeed, Spinoza pithily transforms Descartes' great discovery into a mere '*homo cogitat*' (E2a2), a remark that offers a welcome tonic to the frequent over-prioritising in philosophy of one's experience of being *in* an individual mind and body, at the expense of being *among* many others that determine its existence, whose significance Sharma is arguing for.

For Sharma, attempting to locate the initial source of the experience of the experiencer leads to an infinite regress (2015, 70-2). As Rorty has also written, this is premised on an essentialist worldview that mistakes speech representations for the things themselves. 'We have to drop the notion of correspondence for sentences as well as for thoughts, and see sentences as connected with other sentences rather than with the world' (2010, 98). This is not to concede that collectivity is less real, or that 'truth' exists at an irrecoverable distance away from the isolated, mistaken subject. Rather, there is no separate self or subject existing outside of reality, but it too will '*arise*' out of interdependent events

¹⁴⁷ Reminiscent of Heraclitus' well-known analogy of the moving river.

(2015, 77).¹⁴⁸ By not attempting to ascribe universal truths or essences to the collective, or reducing its diversity and unknowability to a meta-individual level, Sharma instead encourages us to view reality *contingently* – as composed of contingent, interdependent relations and processes that together comprise reality as perceived. It is therefore our very participation in the world which makes it, and which empowers ourselves and others to live as well as we are capable of, *becoming freer as one and all*. In restoring importance to these relations, this model of interdependence takes us back to earlier our accounts of maximal desires-joys (§2.6.4) and love (§3.2.1), wherein the possibility of empowerment and freedom comes not in some given feature of the object, idea or action, but our relation to it, one that is dynamic and continually evolving.

Interdependence goes beyond being a condition for physical survival, constituting even reality as it is understood by sentient organisms. The world is what we perceive, but such perceptions are defined by our common sensory apparatus and, in human beings, the shared social means for comparing and calibrating these perceptions to conform to others. Using the example of defective vision, Sharma observes that an error in sight would be quickly adjusted to what others report perceiving, or how we might imagine their perception to be. Whereas Descartes finds the veracity of dreams and misperceptions as proof of the inadequacy of the senses and the material world, Sharma argues more persuasively that it is a sense ‘collectively created’: we sense it as it is, because it is what we sense (2015, 33-4). ‘What our senses deliver to us simply is, and through coordination with social members, it becomes the real, shared world’. The real *is* what *we sense*, defined and refined by interaction. Interdependence is already always our reality: as Spinoza remarked in §5.1, it is ‘power and culture’ that mislead us, into individualised melancholia and a disappointed political quietism that calls itself resistance.

¹⁴⁸ One can compare here E2p13s, that individuation continues up to the ‘whole of nature’ (§3.2.2).

In this section, I have traversed from cultural theory through to existentialist ethics and multicellular biology to sharpen the focus on collectivity and political subjectivity. Collectivity describes one's awareness of the interdependent and cooperative relations that comprise a social group. In its awareness of the shared suffering and common nature of others, it emerges out of rebellion and is premised on solidarity. Collectivity is therefore a common political subjectivity. At the same time, it is erroneous to perceive oneself as somehow apart from or faithful to the collective and its desire: one is always already constituted by it, and constituting it in turn. Enthusiasm or aloof disappointment constitute two different kinds of relations that impact others, and are duly reciprocated. Our interdependence implies an ethical responsibility for our activity or inactivity at any given conjuncture. The Spinozan concepts of emulation, self-esteem and love indicate possible affective registers to mobilise what Dean earlier called '*our desire for us*'.

Yet the discussion of Dean raised a problem still unaddressed: what makes an interdependent collective subject act and think in ways that realise its common good and enable it to determine itself against reactionary external forces? How can it remain in being without compromising its internal communication or ethical integrity? What separates a revolutionary collective desire from a reactive one, beyond merely the values of the observer? This problem requires further political extrapolation, which I will now undertake by thinking collectivity in a Gramscian way.

§5.4 Common Sense

In her outline of cellular interaction, Sharma raises in passing the importance of sense in collective forms. Some amoeba species live as single cells but become multicellular organisms when starving (2015, 6-8). This can only happen if the given species has sufficient sense-capacity to communicate, through signal and response, with other cells so as to combine together. Given that the ability to sense comprises the individual's experience of

the world, and that such a sense is constituted through interdependent social relations, the possibility of sense has profound political importance in assessing how groups and collectives are formed. It coincides with the same question raised earlier regarding indignation and emulation: how do individuals come to judge each other as of a common nature?

This ability to sense and respond to one's oppression or that of others is socially conditioned, as was discussed in §1.3. Althusser described a 'materiality' to ideology in forming and embodying power relations as cultural practices that reinforce a collective imaginary, albeit one that Marx and Engels would term an 'illusory' one (§5.3.3). Their capacity to sense each other as equals was largely passively produced through these rituals and affects, and Spinoza even considered many of the prophets as being unaware of the socially expedient function they embodied (§3.3), in attempting to coerce the unruly people to live by the guidance of reason using omens, visions and other superstitions which they could understand. The work of Gramsci provides some of the most insightful commentaries on this problem of collective awareness and ideology.

In an article of June 1920, a time when factory occupations and worker councils across northern Italy suggested the possibility of Italian socialists seizing the political and economic means of production nationwide, Gramsci reflected on the additional importance of cultural and intellectual power. For these movements to succeed, 'the proletariat must also face the problem of winning intellectual power' (2000, 70-1). To avoid merely reproducing the very forms they sought to overthrow, it required the formation of 'a new psychology, new ways of feeling, thinking and living that must be specific to the working class, that must be created by it, that will become 'dominant' when the working class becomes the dominant class'. But Gramsci's analysis at this stage still seemed to imply that the mind of the proletariat was a

tabula rasa, passive and inert. It had unmet 'metaphysical needs' that, were they articulated effectively by an organised party, could be sure of realising power (43, 71, 81-2).

Six years later, Gramsci had been imprisoned by the now-Fascist government. Like his colleagues in the Italian Communist Party and others overseas, Gramsci had underestimated and dismissed the Fascists and their popularity as a short-lived and insubstantial movement of the 'petty bourgeoisie' until too late (138-9).¹⁴⁹ His *Prison Notebooks* offer a more nuanced reflection on this question of consciousness. Gramsci develops the concept of 'hegemony' to explore how capitalism had remained resilient despite the profound economic crises of 1917-21. No longer proposing the creation of a proletarian consciousness in a void, an *ex nihilo* myth like that of Spinoza's optimum state in §4.2.2, Gramsci came instead to recognise that power is mediated not just along state-political or 'economistic' lines,¹⁵⁰ but also culturally, through the everyday ideas and beliefs people hold about the world. He now identifies 'the importance of facts of culture and thought in the development of history', and the importance of intellectual-cultural forms of coercion and consent in cementing social relations (2000, 195). Popular beliefs therefore possess a solid material force, shaped into form by ruling ideologies (200). These hegemonic facts are 'instruments of domination' that must be tackled with the same seriousness as political and economic forms of oppression (196). To succeed, revolutionaries need to make 'the governed intellectually independent of the governing', through popular education and self-education (196; cf. 332-3).¹⁵¹ The argument is not dissimilar to the ethically liberatory readings discussed in §5.2.2, wherein collective political freedom is a consequence of the individual's

¹⁴⁹ The context is all too relevant to collective desire, and is returned to via Reich, a contemporary, in §5.5.

¹⁵⁰ Gramsci's critique of 'economism' in his fellow Marxists (e.g. 2000, 192-4) was also made contemporaneously by Reich, 1972, 284-5.

¹⁵¹ Gramsci's shift may have also been inspired by Marx's third thesis on Feuerbach: 'the educator must himself be educated' (Marx and Engels, 1998, 570).

freedom. Gramsci comes to find such an optimistic position unviable against the overwhelming forces of Fascism and populist fear.

Gramsci reconsiders societies as composed of 'relations of force' at any given conjuncture, which must be understood in a longer 'war of position' (201-9, 224-6). In his analysis, western states like Italy and Germany differ from Bolshevik Russia in having a much larger and more traditionally entrenched 'civil society' which through religion, popular journalism, a more diffuse distribution of private property ownership, an expediently useless state education system and a conservative authoritarian family structure, would continue to reproduce hegemonic domination without the direct intrusion of capitalists or the state, even if workers were to seize every factory. To tackle it, the war of position involves a longer-term campaign to produce a working class hegemonic and democratic movement capable of becoming popular enough – and self-determining enough – to succeed decisively (225-30). Yet given the conservative forces within civil society that nourished the popularity of Fascism and predisposed people to be indifferent or even hostile to collective forms, the war of position could only succeed by persuading the Italian people using their existing frames of reference.

In this way, Gramsci outlines the necessity of what we described in §2.6.1 as *re-programming* – whereas our analysis concerned the retuning of affects of joy, Gramsci turns to how revolutionaries might re-programme existing hegemonic structures with a new kind of 'common sense', a belief-set that is construed as common and obviously known, yet socially progressive. It contains two elements: the first is a critique of existing common sense as something 'incoherent' and 'ambiguous, contradictory and multiform' in the minds of individuals (343, 346). By critically and plainly exposing the contradictions of existing 'common sense', considered as a form of 'faith' and 'folklore' (339, 343), Gramsci hopes that a more progressive popular culture and education system would raise the general

intellectual level of the people. It would serve to enable them to recognise the 'submission and intellectual subordination' implicit in the hegemonic forms foisted upon it (328), and enable them 'in renovating and making 'critical' an already existing activity', that of everyday discussion and analysis (332), to more freely recognise their shared common oppression and their greater empowerment through collective political force (339-40).

Gramsci's concept of hegemony hereby undergoes a transformation from a transcendent viewpoint (class consciousness onto a proletarian tabula rasa, leading to total revolution), to an immanent one (repurposing common sense by purging bourgeois hegemonic views, leading to greater popular self-determination). The proletarians who become aware of these hegemonic forms and are able to challenge them with their own critical reasoning are 'organic intellectuals'; those that defend conventional civil society and its bourgeois forms are 'traditional intellectuals' (340-1). What Gramsci envisioned in this transformation of common sense was nothing less than the undertaking 'on an intellectual plane... what the Reformation was in Protestant countries' (362).

The second element sought to repurpose these myths and inchoate fragments towards a collectively liberatory end. While Gramsci indicated the importance of generating organic intellectuals, for broader society a mass democratic movement was required, one led by a political party. Yet how would such a party become popular, given the forces ranged against it? Via Machiavelli, Gramsci conceives of the party being like a 'modern Prince': a 'collective individual' which embodies and becomes the symbol of the 'collective will' (232, 238-9). Like Sorel's 'myth' of the general strike, Gramsci sees potential in the dramatic staging or 'creation of concrete fantasy which acts on a dispersed and shattered people to arouse and organize its collective will' (239). In terms abstruse enough to evade the prison censor, Gramsci's modern Prince would be a platform for a 'national-popular collective will'

to come into formation and self-awareness through 'concrete and rational' goals that would be realised by a popular, universally-inclusive and democratic party (240-3).

Its very activity would find itself opposed vigorously by the traditionally powerful, propertied classes, but for Gramsci, historical instances like the Reformation or Jacobinism in Revolutionary France indicated that with sufficient popular support and consciousness, a shared common sense by way of an 'intellectual and moral reformation' could overcome overwhelming hegemonic forces. It was not that individuals would merely support a dramatised modern Prince party: as Gramsci envisioned, they would become it, participating in the 'collective consciousness' of a 'collective individual' (244). Apprehensive of its repressive and conformist implications, Gramsci would later add that this collective would be like an orchestra in rehearsal, 'each instrument playing for itself', giving the impression of a 'most dreadful cacophony', but ultimately 'necessary for the orchestra to live as a single 'instrument'' (245).

It remains unclear what form exactly this dramatic modern Prince might have taken. Thomas conceives it as 'a coalition of the rebellious subalterns', a pedagogical laboratory for intellectual self-liberation (2013, 32-3; cf. 2009, 437-8). Coutinho considers it a feature of Gramsci's broader 'cultural front' that aimed to establish 'the conditions for the hegemony of the subaltern classes, for their victory in the 'war of position' for socialism' (2012, 114-5). While both readings are right to prioritise Gramsci's broader vision for subaltern liberation, they overlook Gramsci's own interest in the strategic and instrumental use of myths and 'common sense' for producing and articulating a liberatory position. His attention to what is already 'operative' might instead connote that a collective subjectivity, and with it a collective desire, can only be produced by reassembling the fragments of popular myths and forms of speech. These would be premises for collective liberation – equal access to resources like housing, healthcare and education, freedom from the necessity of full-time

drudgerous work, freedom of speech, right to due process, and so on – articulated in a form already common and immediately sensible, without condescension. Its mythic nature is a critical self-reflection on the composition of political demands.

Like Rousseau's *volonté générale*, Spinoza's *una veluti mente* or even the UN's 1948 Universal Declaration of 'Human Rights', such concepts and demands are also declarative, calling themselves into being, and immediately naturalising themselves as rights. They are no less real for it because, as the discussion of interdependence in the last section emphasised, our being is in our contingent and interdependent relations, something which can be rooted back to the individual's ontological empowerment through their desire, outlined in Chapter 2. It is in this way that Stuart Hall remains the most effective reader of Gramsci. His invocation that to think 'in a Gramscian way' is to not merely critically assess the hegemonic forms dominating a current conjuncture, but to think strategically and pragmatically about how such forms become hegemonic in the first place, and how they can be gradually but effectively dismantled and transformed.

I am talking about a renewal of the whole socialist project in the context of modern social and cultural life. I mean shifting the relations of forces — not so that Utopia comes the day after the next general election, but so that the *tendencies* begin to run another way. (1987, 21).

It entails reviving the socialist project not in outlier, utopian or defeated fashion, but with a desire to become the leading class and present what *is* common sense in a form readily graspable. Rather than Machiavelli's prince, §3.4 instead indicated that the Spinozan prophet might be a more fruitful mythic model, capable of both adequately grasping the common good and relaying it persuasively in a shared affective and imaginary register. Yet Hall's reading also asserts that hegemonic ideologies do not emerge *ex nihilo* – the Thatcherism he critiqued was not merely a 'false consciousness' but one rooted in the fears, hopes and desires of the mainly English *multitudo*, desires it was able to partially satisfy. As Gramsci discovered in his prison reflections, mobilising a collective subjectivity required

reckoning with its existing collective form, however passive and inert, and the precise means needed to enable as many as one could to become more physically and intellectually capable. It is a matter of 'how ideas become practical forces' as Annibale Pastore, Gramsci's philosophy professor at Turin, concisely puts it (in Gramsci, 2000, 30). Desiring freedom is only possible and made worthwhile when a collective around one shares in that same desire, unburdened of the fear that cements a condition of passivity and popular servitude. The question then becomes how a political movement becomes capable of realising this inherent power.

§5.5 Popular Movements

In §5.1 I outlined the problem of political change. I presented the 'ethically liberatory' reading of Spinoza and made three criticisms: firstly, that it prioritised rational discourse and consensus over the affective and imaginative registers that most commonly constitute everyday life, thereby possessing a subtly debilitating elitism, a criticism I return to shortly. Secondly, that it attempted to transpose the virtues of the free philosopher over the collective, something that Spinoza's own politics avoided. Though Spinoza's politics is necessarily incomplete, one can identify a preoccupation with unanimity (§3.2.2) and collective rationality (§4.3), and over §5.3 we explored this, drawing particular inspiration from interdependence (§5.3.4), and the critique of 'meta-individual' distortions. Thirdly, that it did not account for how individuals rendered passive and fearful by authoritarian structures become capable of resisting. The strengths and limits of the indignation reading (§5.2.3) have been identified as a possible alternative, as has emulation (§5.2.5), and the account of developing a common sense in §5.4 also sought to advance this question, but it requires some final development.

This section will expand on that first criticism by outlining the *political* in collective political subjectivity in more detail. If there is a danger in homogenising a collective group

into a frozen, meta-individual form, there is equal peril in presenting a concept of collectivity so vague and heterogeneous as to be without content. This danger was intimated in the discussion of *multitudo* in §3.6 and §4.4, and in the limits of Dean's conception of the people 'as the rest of us' earlier in §5.3. What is meant exactly by 'people'?

§5.5.1 Naming the People

Avoiding a difficult philological and historiographical debate, I will begin instead with an insight found in Critchley, wherein he abandons the term 'proletariat' as connoting a revolutionary subject that has 'precisely broken down' (2008, 103), an influential claim first made by Laclau and Mouffe (1985) that I return to shortly. Critchley does not present an alternative beyond a vague 'multiplication of social actors' (2008, 91), but his rationale is more fruitful. 'The problem of political subjectivity is a question of *naming*,' he writes, one 'of naming a political subject and organizing politically around that name'. This act of political nomination enables an indignant social group (or 'determinate particularity') to become identified as a political subject and, through that, begin to organise politically and hegemonically around that name. Naming the political subject becomes the first act of its becoming such a subject. Laclau makes the same argument earlier in more abstract but no less effective terms: the name is an 'empty signifier' but one with the productive capacity to unify a heterogeneous ensemble of demands (2007b, 108).

Critchley gives the example of indigenous struggles, whereby those excluded and without (property) rights challenge the state order by asserting their visibility and *right* to the land (110-1). Such a force is akin to that of the declarative power of common sense hinted at in the last section. Critchley's insight partially stems from Rancière, who in a number of short works has advanced a concept of the political subject as the disruptive manifestation of the socially excluded *demos* from a given political order (cf. 2007, 32-5). In what is variously translated as 'the part of no part' or the 'count of the uncounted' (1999, 6-

8, 89-90; 2010, 33-5), Rancière applies the ancient Athenian democratic practices of enfranchising only qualified males – a minority democratic rule, leaving out the larger part of the actual population – to describe a continual tension in the political sphere (1999, 6-11). This is between authorities or ‘police’ who seek to enforce a ‘consensus’ of ‘the political’ sphere, envisioned as a hierarchy of technocratic competences that excludes the desires and demands of the *demos*, and the ‘people’ as a manifestation of the excluded who noisily challenge this consensus by asserting their own rights and thus constitute ‘politics’ (2006, 51-5; 1999, 29-35). The ‘political subject is a capacity for staging scenes of dissensus’ (2010, 69), and such dissensus constitutes both the foundation and form of the political subject, and the very marrow of political activity.

In the process the collective political subject is never a given, as in a contingent social group that exists in latent form until a protest – it rather comes into being through its very activity as it disrupts the appearance of police stability and social order.¹⁵² Mouffe has made a similar case for the necessity of antagonism and disruption for a healthy democratic culture. Through a concept of ‘agonistic pluralism’ (1993, 3-7; 2000, ch. 4; 2005, 30-4, 120-1; cf. Laclau and Mouffe, 2001, 125; Laclau, 2007a, 29), she identifies the closing-down of adversarial politics and the universalisation of social identities as a dangerous tendency towards consensus that neutralises the power of all collective actors. Like Rancière, she identifies what could be called a neoliberal enclosure of the political sphere, one that has emptied out all forms of political antagonism into a restrictive model of rational self-interest as the basis of individual agency, and a claim of generic consensus that Mouffe (2005, 1-6), Laclau (2007b, 222), Rancière (2010, 42) and others have billed the ‘post-political’ or ‘the end of politics’.

¹⁵² In this sense, Rancière’s remarks about reconfiguring the distribution of the sensible (e.g. 1999, 38-9) can be re-aligned with a critical ex-comrade, Badiou. Like the disruption of the ‘people’ as the part with no part, Badiou accounts for the event as rupturing the State by revealing its underlying logic and challenging its ordering of individuals, or ‘state of the situation’ (2005, 23-30).

In its stead, Mouffe inadvertently repeats the same transformation in thought described in Gramsci and hegemony earlier. To traditional Marxists, it is a dangerous dream to imagine going ‘beyond hegemony’ (2005, 118) or transcending to a higher political order liberated from violence, conflict or disagreement altogether. Instead, Laclau, Mouffe and Rancière identify another kind of political project, one that seeks not state power or consensus, but a re-organisation of the articulation of dissenting concerns. Hence the term ‘proletariat’ is discarded, with more theoretical robustness than Critchley: if it is difficult for even a minority of actors to identify with it, then it no longer serves a hegemonic purpose (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001, 176-8). The task instead is to articulate new names/subjectivities that possess sufficient force for actors to mobilise around them – an insight that will remind us of the importance in the TTP of prophets constructing compelling narratives and appealing to the imagination in order to persuade individuals to join together in stable communities and live according to reason, discussed in Chapter 3. As Rancière puts, it requires not founding ‘a counterpower susceptible of governing a future society, but simply to effect a demonstration of *capacity* which is also a demonstration of *community*’ (2007, 49). To challenge the constraining political order, social struggles must be pluralised and acted out on various political fronts according to this influential radical democratic analysis.

From our foregoing discussion, we would put the terms even more closely together: capacity is community. Yet one problem with this argument is its tendency to virtually ignore fundamental social and economic factors in its emphasis on the political, suggesting that social actors are entirely constituted in their politicised forms as they attempt to enact a redistribution of the sensible, e.g. as protestors, strikers, and so on. There is little account of how to reckon with embedded forms of ideology that forestall dissent or prevent belief in the ‘realism’ of political change. Nor is the essential and difficult question of appropriate forms of organisation tackled. Instead, it is assumed that some parts of the excluded *demos* will naturalistically become indignant and present their concerns, and the mere articulation

of these is sufficient for a healthy politics – a weakness we identified earlier in Spinoza’s faith in deliberative assemblies (§4.6), and Matheron’s argument for the good of indignation (§5.2.3). Yet the advance these analyses make over those of Dean, Gilbert, and Hardt and Negri is their emphasis on the constitution of *a* political subjectivity through its disruptive activity.

To a different end, one finds the same argument in Hallward, wherein ‘the people’ as political subject is not an empirical category, but one constituted by their ‘*actively willing*’, to the extent they energetically will and perceive themselves as a singular, willing subject (2009, 21). Whereas Hallward prioritises rational deliberation and intellectual self-liberation, coinciding with the first position criticised in the ethically liberatory Spinoza reading (§5.2.2), Mouffe and Laclau’s later writings present a more Spinozan way to conceive political movement in terms of the affects. ‘The mistake of liberal rationalism’, Mouffe writes, ‘is to ignore the affective dimension mobilized by collective identifications and to imagine that those supposedly archaic ‘passions’ are bound to disappear with the advance of individualism and the progress of rationality’ (2005, 6; cf. 24-5). At the root of these political affects are identifications that already pervade the political sphere, and which must be re-programmed if a political movement is to mobilise popular support. Laclau also notes ‘the primary role of affect in cementing this articulation’ of the name of the political subject, in this case ‘people’, and any possibility of its success (2007b, 169). It is not that the collective empowerment of all through knowledge is devalued or dismissed. Rather, there remains a considerable gulf that must be bridged between the dispersal and passivity of social groups in the contemporary conjuncture, and the ‘communism of minds’ Matheron identifies as the implication of Spinoza’s third kind of knowledge.

So, this political subject we have been identifying is one that is collective, dynamic and interdependent, and shares and participates in the same affects and imaginings. As Critchley

suggested, its coming into being occurs through its naming and disruptive presentation. This argument is illuminated with a parallel reflection: ethical theory is historically premised on *is* and *ought* claims, at times extended into political theory (cf. Hume, 1960, 469). Yet the declaration of the particular rights of a named political subject does not mean those rights exist. Spinoza's political naturalism is insightful here: collective right extends only as far as collective powers. But in declaring these *rights*, the collective declares an intention to claim what is stated as already belonging to it, and to fight and defend this claim if necessary. The authority can either make concessions, or continue its violence, in which case it either consolidates its authority or collapses, as with indignation (§5.2.3). In this way, the powers of diverse bodies combine into a collective through a shared claim. Its identity *is* its identification with an (imagined) identity.

There is nothing normatively popular about it either, even if it polemically takes up the moniker of 'the people'. It necessarily remains 'a partial component which nevertheless aspires to be conceived as the only legitimate totality' (Laclau, 2007b, 81). It is a 'univocal multiplicity' as Guattari puts it, one whose collective desire 'crystallises' in the articulation of its struggle and its activity (2009, 159; cf. 41-5). In order to maintain and persevere in its own being and enjoy a shared sense of self-esteem, a collective cannot but imagine its demands having universal significance. Marx and Engels presented this same process much earlier in the *German Ideology*. Even before it had established contact across a given society, the industrial proletariat would 'present its interest as the common interest of all the members of society', giving 'its ideas the form of universality, and present them as the only rational, universally valid ones', not just as a particular class, but representing the whole of humanity (Marx and Engels, 1998, 68). Even indirectly through the affects and a shared imaginary (or 'common sense', as was outlined in §5.4), a collective political subject aspires to think and act *una veluti mente*. Not as if by the mind of a single individual, which is tyranny, but by the collective observation and commitment to reasonable ways of living,

which as Chapters 1 and 3 presented, are intrinsically peaceful, cooperative, joyous and egalitarian.

§5.5.2 Genealogy of Collective Political Subjectivity

Based on the foregoing discussion of critical material, I now propose a brief outline of a genealogy of collective political subjectivity. This model will draw on what parts we have discovered can animate our concept of collective desire, like emulation, collectivity, interdependence, and common sense, and will serve us as we take our analysis into its final stages.

First, a number of individuals afflicted and indignant by a common problem recognise each other's suffering and its common cause. They cooperate together in challenging the perceived perpetrator of this problem. In order for their energies not to burn-out following either initial defeat or the temporary cessation of their affliction, they will need to cultivate and amplify their collective identity. (This will already be tentatively established by the common *name* of their campaign and the activity of their common willing, via §5.2.5). Amplifying this collective subjectivity involves recognising their intrinsic interdependence and common nature, and thinking, talking and acting in ways that enhance the collective group's right, and diminish the right of those that would oppress it (what Rancière termed 'police').

Following Gramsci, any given conjuncture is assessed as a relation of forces, in varying states of activity or passivity. Spinoza reminds us to conceive the mind's passivity as a piece with physical passivity, explored through the prism of servitude in Chapter 1.¹⁵³ Desire is the key to conceiving what makes a human mind and a body active, as §2.4 outlined. But as individuals are susceptible to the servitude of affects that determine unreasonable desires

¹⁵³ A passivity that is *disciplined*, according to Foucault, by the life-preserving social institutions of modernity (cf. 1977, 136-8).

(i.e. those that do not correlate with actual self-preservation and its lasting joys), it is the imagination and passive joyous affects followed by the active affects that are necessary to enable an individual to think and act in ways that increase their capability (*potentia*) and responsibility (*potestas*). This can be applied to social contexts, be it the Hebrew people (§3.4) or the optimum political state (§4.5.1). Reflecting on political movement as a self-constituting activity around the signifier of a name, its efficacy is premised on its ability to mobilise through the affects. One might attempt a formula for this, then: collective desire is what “collective desire” says and feels it does.

§5.5.3 Reich’s Real Movement

For oppressed yet passive and fearful social groups, the task becomes changing the belief that things cannot change, that this is the Real. That instead there *is* a collective, as Gilbert and Dean argued. But there remains no bulwark within the ‘part of no part’ or ‘agonistic’ *demos* that connotes it will be intrinsically liberatory, nothing of its desire that implies it will not inhibit the desires of other social actors, be it on racial, religious, gender, sexuality or other lines. Rancière’s sceptical riposte to Negri’s affirmation of multitudes – ‘did the Arab crowds applauding the Twin Towers carnage in the name of Allah constitute an example of the ‘multitude’?’ (2010, 89) – can be justly applied to his disruptive politics too.

Individual and collective desire therefore need to be understood through a criterion. This thesis has argued that Spinoza’s criterion of power offers a consistent plane in which the individual’s desire and joy are naturally drawn towards sociality, cooperation and knowledge. Re-programming political institutions to reproduce a tolerant, egalitarian and democratic outlook can enable as many citizens as possible to recognise each other as of a common nature, and so actively assist each other, leading to greater collective empowerment. This is the common sense outlined earlier, the capability to identify oneself as among a common political subject that is universally inclusive and committed to reducing

all social causes of suffering like poverty, discrimination and ignorance. Though as Spinoza claims we 'are not born to be citizens, but are made so' (TP 5.2), this production of a hegemonic common sense does not occur *ex nihilo*. Before political and social institutions are transformed, the movements that seek to realise their collective desire must ensure that their own organisational structures do not contain elements of authoritarian repression, coercion and reaction that will stymie its members' development and destroy its legitimacy and support, should it attain influence and power. On the other hand, an organisational structure must be sufficiently complex that it can maintain its constituent parts' participation and investment of desires while also mobilising further support from other still-passive individuals, particularly when it is confronted with adversity, be it from other reactive social forces or state repression.

Reich offers three helpful observations in this regard that take us into the final section. The first concerns the popularity of Fascism across liberal educated Europe during the 1930s, a phenomenon that Reich, like Gramsci, finds remarkable given that it contradicted the political expectations of many that economic crisis would lead to popular socialist revolutions across Europe. Reich's assessment is more nuanced, finding that Fascism was able to mobilise both reactionary and revolutionary desires, particularly among the lower middle class, whose internal libidinal structures he analyses in detail. Ideology is an '*active force*' and '*material power*', embedding an unequal distribution of economic relations with the force of tradition, normality and order, be it through patriarchal family and work structures, identification with the imperial state and the glory of military service, or a widespread fear of the 'chaos' and deviancy of workers' uprisings, which crystallised into a collective desire for authoritarian rule, and a '*complete identification with state power*' (1993, 13-8, 29-33, 45-69). Rising living standards and a growing proliferation of aspirational consumerism had additionally impacted the psychic structures of many among the working class, who had now also identified with this reactionary middle class. 'The lower middle-class

bedroom suite ... the consequent suppression of the wife ... the “decent” suit of clothes for Sunday ... have an incomparably greater reactionary influence when repeated day after day than thousands of revolutionary rallies and leaflets can ever hope to counterbalance’ (69). If ‘psychic structure and social situation seldom coincide’ (64), as Reich asserts and innumerable historical examples seem to verify, then the task becomes understanding and disarming the reactive tendencies of desire, so as to more effectively enable its politically liberatory realisation.

For socialist movements to succeed, they needed to speak the language of the passive people, by which it would animate them. Writing in 1934, Reich reflects that contemporary communist parties had failed to make contact with ‘what happens in “people’s heads”’ and their ‘psychical structures’ (1972, 284). This meant understanding desire, grasping the subjective worldview of the working class in terms of their ‘progressive desires’ against the ‘traditional bonds’ that prevented such ideas from developing (289). Class consciousness – which one can expand to the cultivation of any liberatory collective political subjectivity – required detachment from existing structures of authority, in this case conservative bourgeois sexual and, by consequence, social morality (295-301). If revolutionaries could speak in terms of popular desires on a platform of transparent, needs-based and democratic politics, then they would succeed where secret party decisions and factional disputes, tedious economic proselytising and ascetic appeals for repressing dissent in the name of party unity never would (327-32). For Reich, ‘it makes an enormous difference whether one says, “We are going to expropriate the large capitalists,” or “We are taking our property into our rightful control”’ (356). The latter appeals to desire and can be plainly understood, thereby being democratic and open to group input. As he adds, the ‘actual take-over of power in factories must be preceded by concrete preparation for this take-over *in the mind*’. In such a conjuncture the ‘enemy within’ was fear (358), the inhibition against clearly realising one’s needs, at the level of desire and the political.

But Reich's thinking undergoes great transformation after 1934, when the violence of Nazi populism descends to its catastrophic nadir. Though he would continue to assert the priority of democracy as informed desire, the role of the state and social institutions in liberally educating the young to prevent the early implantation of reactionary attitudes and desires grows in importance. If the state can be used as a tool of the worst oppression, it also holds potential as a vehicle to realising the common good in the journey to freedom.

§5.6 The State

A comprehensive outline of contemporary critiques of the nation-state for politically liberatory projects is beyond the scope of this chapter, but within the problem of collectivity and desiring freedom, I wish to turn our analysis in the final part to the state. Critchley laments that though 'the state is a limitation on human existence and we would be better off without it', it is something 'we are stuck with' (2008, 111-2) and, like much else in Critchley's worldview, must be accepted as a necessary evil. Gilbert, Rancière, Laclau and Mouffe are just as ambivalent, valorising a collectivist or popular politics of resistance while ignoring the state or, to take Lenin's phrase, hoping it will wither away in the face of agonistic multitudes somehow imbued with the reason, ability and desire to reproduce social institutions autonomously.

This partly reflects the influence of the anti-globalisation movement of the late 1990s and early 2000s, which often took as a given that the nation-state had drastically ceded power to multinational corporations and was no longer a relevant political concern. In the process it repeats what Foucault described as a 'state-phobia' in neoliberalism (2008, 76), a logic of governmentality that conflates the state with political and economic authoritarianism, all the while relying on the state to produce and maintain the conditions for 'free-market' capitalism. Such a complacency has become witheringly clear on the Left in recent years with the reaction to 'austerity' cuts to government spending, as nation-states

have curtailed or in places eliminated their social programmes for the disabled, unemployed or those seeking asylum, at times deploying police or bureaucratic violence to beat, imprison or starve the poorest into submission, often with an electoral mandate.

Reich's realisation that the oppressive state could become a liberatory one is apt, and alongside the power of desire within fascism, and the importance for revolutionaries in using an everyday political imaginary, allows us to now introduce his third key observation. If revolutionary movements are to succeed, as we argued in the last section, they need to operate at the level of the affects and desire, articulating a common but inhibited longing for freedom in a language that people can understand and participate in. This also involves actively alleviating reactionary tendencies from forming within organisational structures. By 1946, Reich clarifies his political position, terming it 'work-democracy', in which the natural functions of 'vital work [i.e. socially useful], natural love and knowledge' would be enabled to flourish through a socialist democratic, international federation of interdependent worker-led cooperatives (1993, 313-5, a precursor to London's *recommune*). To prevent the re-emergence of mass authoritarian movements, it is not enough to emphasise the revolutionary nature of desire itself, as Deleuze and Guattari have since with their subject groups (2013a, 320-1). In Reich's view, the majority of the population must be raised to an elementary level of capability, able to think for itself. It must be able to freely bear 'social responsibility', whose occasional guilty burden is something that mass authoritarian movements will promise, dangerously, to divest them of (1993, 62, 201-4, 224-9, 316-21). Cultivating the sense and maturity to bear social responsibility therefore requires democratic state forms to intervene at the earliest stage, to ensure children and young people are sufficiently educated to understand their own desires, and their responsibilities in realising them.

In this way, the security and integrity of work-democracy's cooperatives could be protected against self-seeking or reactionary counter-forces. It is therefore 'the state's duty not only to encourage the passionate yearning for freedom in working masses of people; *it must also make every effort to make them capable of freedom*' (284). In a similar line of reasoning to Spinoza in §4.2.2, the virtue of the democratic state – democratic not merely in terms of occasional elections, but in the very structure of its administrative, social and economic institutions – is the freedom to live well that it affords. Power is again understood as a capability and desire for freedom, something that, to use Spinoza's phrase, is made, not born. If power and culture deceive, they can also rectify.

This argument is partially articulated by Gramsci, for whom the lesson of hegemony for new democratic movements is to *become* the dominant class. In the hegemonic war of position then, the state is a transitory but necessary conquest and possession of a collective political subject. As Laclau and Mouffe concisely put, 'a class does not *take State power*, it *becomes State*' (2001, 69). This thereby indicates the substance of Gramsci's implicit and Reich's explicit critique of Leninism, which had pledged to wither away the state following the revolutionary overthrow of the bourgeoisie with a dictatorship of the proletariat. Whereas Gramsci argues for the necessity of the state disappearing into civil society or 'regulated society' (2000, 235), Reich is more clear in criticising the Soviet Union as merely replacing Tsarist authoritarian capitalism with a state authoritarian capitalism (1993, 246-8). Like Gramsci, Reich argues that while the '*direct realization of a nonauthoritarian, free society*' is not immediately possible, any revolutionary takeover has to rapidly integrate democratic self-government into its social institutions in order to maintain its ethical foundations and popular support (1993, 239-41).

A similar critique occurs in Poulantzas' later writings, where he identifies 'the democratic road to socialism' as the only one worth taking, avoiding both capitalist and

technocratic statist authoritarianism (2000, 256) with their distrust and infantilisation of the masses. If socialism is to succeed on its own terms through the egalitarian and democratic empowerment of all, then it would need to follow Gramsci's lesson, conceiving of the state as a 'condensation' of social forces (257-9). Such forces can be more effectively modified and transformed *within* state apparatuses, rather than outside them. The accomplishment of collective desire therefore needs to target and capture state institutions in a longer popular struggle achieved in stages, making strategic alliances with a broad range of social groups (like the middle class) who would otherwise bring down the socialist state (261-3). Faced with the Scylla of quietist irrelevance or the Charybdis of Jacobin Terror, Poulantzas made the quiet call that 'socialism will be democratic or it will not be at all' (265).

However, if the first 'state-phobic' position is complacent, this account seems no less imperilled by its faith that a socially progressive state can remain bound to a programme of popular freedom. Poulantzas intimates that self-managing workers' cooperatives could provide one buttress for this, but in 1978 such a proposal was already fettered by bureaucratic obstacles and a lack of detail about how this would occur in non-industrial workplaces, and nearly forty years on, seems remote. In a 1969 work that now reads as grimly prophetic, Ralph Miliband warns that any socialist movement that seeks political power and to realise the collective desire of its movement would need to reckon with the state in a far more sophisticated way. Even with the democratic commitments that Reich and Poulantzas outline, acquiring a majority in a representative assembly or even control of government by no means secured a command of the state. 'What 'the state' stands for is a number of particular institutions' – including its administrative, coercive and judicial apparatuses 'which, together, constitute its reality' (1969, 49).

Just as Gramsci observes hegemonic forces in popular culture and in the minds of the people, Miliband also identifies a 'socially cohesive' middle class hegemony that pervades

these state institutions with a conservative ethos, committed to the rule of property and the virtue of private enterprise, allowing in rare recruits from the working class only after an extensive process of 'bourgeoisification' (39-48, 60-6). This middle class hegemony is supplemented by a much wider range of social forms that legitimates it, like the popular media, higher education, private business, religion and so on, all generally headed by candidates from the same narrow upper middle class. An elite education and social connections effectively ensure that the 'race is rigged' (43). Legitimizing social institutions obscure a narrow consensus around the virtues of private enterprise with party political disputes, elections and scandals that provide a 'superficial and mystifying distraction' (69), or cruel optimism as Berlant put it, from what one could call, in a Spinozan way, a coherent, effective and collective ruling class desire.

Miliband's account serves as a final, useful corrective to theorising the state: the collective desire for freedom will be painfully disappointed if it invests all its hopes in being elected to the state – instead it must *become* the state, *become* common sense, and so forth. Any liberatory movement will be faced with a variety of state institutions staffed by conservative members of the upper middle class who will be hegemonically disposed to sabotaging it, even if unconsciously. Miliband observes a common panic to then appease the 'business community' and stall the threat of capital flight by reneging on earlier electoral promises, thereby betraying and losing the participation of the movement's supporters (99-101). Laconically, Miliband advises that any liberatory movement must work as quickly as possible with 'greater boldness' to modify and transform as many state apparatuses as it can, as quickly as it can, so that they are as democratic, transparent and participatory as they can be, before these hegemonic forces drive it into collapse or compromise. He was not optimistic of its chances.

Collective political subjects desiring freedom have been bitterly disappointed across history by the compromises and defeat of their anointed leaders. Poulantzas and Reich in different ways emphasise the importance of democratic, transparent and accountable structures as the means and end of revolutionary movements, and the necessity of increasing the intellectual powers of the people so that they are capable of democratic responsibility. At the same time, one can draw on what Harvey has recently termed ‘termite theory’: those attempts to collapse capitalism from within through anti-statist, community and worker-based organisations, that are typically horizontalist and non-violent. Should any become sufficiently popular and disruptive to capital’s accumulation, it will happily ‘call in the exterminators (state powers)’ to crush it (2013, 124-5). Any collective political movement which becomes sufficiently powerful will likely find itself under varying forms of attack if it does not immediately conciliate with traditions-entrenched authoritarian state forms. An ethical position of non-violence will be a complacent luxury. As Machiavelli articulated, Spinoza understood and Gramsci later realised to his cost, to transform social institutions one must become the state, but such a becoming is only possible as an ‘armed prophet’ (Machiavelli, 2005, 22), capable of defending its collective natural right. This necessarily requires a degree of organisational (and hence hierarchical) complexity, strategic nous, and the ability to establish broad alliances across social actors towards the *common sense* of collectively becoming freer.

§5.7 Conclusion

This chapter has pursued an analysis of collectivity as an interdependent, self-constituting political activity, across a much wider number of political and cultural theorists and contexts than the previous chapters. It has sought to theorise collectivity in a Spinozan way, using the criterion of the individual’s empowerment through desire and the affects being invested into collective political forms. It began with an account of political change in Spinoza, assessing

that historical contexts and political naturalism could only partially account for how states might change their form or become more intrinsically free (§5.2.1). Indignation, particularly via Matheron's reconstructive analysis, indicated a more fruitful way of conceiving political change within Spinozan terms, but the account remained limited by its reliance on passive sad affects (§5.2.3). The common 'ethically liberatory' reading of Spinoza through the individual's rational empowerment presented another way to conceive political transformation (§5.2.2), but was also unable to account for the necessary mobilisation of popular movements. A speculative case was then made for a collective politics based primarily on emulation (§5.2.5), love, pity, self-esteem and the active affects of fortitude, courage and generosity in Spinoza.

Yet collectivity still seemed insufficiently clear, and so the analysis detoured through Dean, Gilbert, Benjamin, Lukács, Marx and Engels, Sartre, Sharma, Camus, Critchley, Rancière, Mouffe, Laclau, Gramsci, Reich, Poulantzas and Miliband. It constructed an account of collective political subjectivity rooted in interdependence, activity, diversity, shared consciousness and the development of a common sense that increases the imaginative and affective recognition of those of a 'common nature', the foundation of mutual assistance in Spinoza. It also required abandoning normative notions of the collective as an empirical or popular category, one instead constituted by its disruptive presence, but capable of mobilising itself and communicating its aims by using the language and desires of everyday life. Acting outside or against the state only forestalled the danger of state violence for a later conjuncture, and so a democratic yet instrumental account of the state was outlined in the last section, so that the institutional features of collective empowerment might be more effectively and boldly deployed in future conjunctures.

With the exception perhaps of Hardt and Negri, I find it striking that all of the theorists drawn on in this chapter have been avowedly and reasonably pessimistic about the

possibilities of collective freedom in the current era. Despite a relative increase in living standards and education in the West secured by popular struggles and the threat of workers' insurrections by previous generations, the popular desire for a more total freedom remains inhibited by disappointment and cynicism, in places resulting in the Left melancholia analysed earlier. A virtuous, quietist call for resistance is the order of the day, publishing books, paying rents and taxes, as the accumulation of private capital continues unimpeded. If previous collective forms can teach us anything, it is that their contagious motivation and joy only comes into being in the midst of participating in their activity. There is no intrinsic guarantee that they will remain consistently egalitarian (that is, if they start so) or that they will succeed or fail in their avowed goals. But collective desire is immanent, never teleological. It acts out of solidarity with others, and is constituted by these first, real affective bonds – not transcendent and promethean ambitions of total class uniformity, of changing *everything, forever*.

It really is a case of finding spaces of enjoyment and relations of friendship, even to preserve our own mental and physical power. Collective desire is all about 'making hope practical, rather than despair convincing' (Williams, 1989, 209), pursuing a 'pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will' (Gramsci, 1992, 175). Our joys indicate what is empowering, and by educating our joys, extending our imaginations through broadening our range of experiences, and re-programming our desires, joys and hopes to correlate with what might actually aid our collective well-being, we will become freer (§2.6). Friendship and love are the glue of common association, the feeling and result of being among those of a common nature. Such a 'commons' is not rooted in crude cultural norms of "nature", be it race or gender, but in a shared imaginary and sense of what is common to all which, by the guidance of reason, becomes a universal, tolerant, peaceable and egalitarian sense. In this way, becoming-collective involves developing a perspective that expands from becoming-

multiple, to becoming-common, to becoming-universal, at one with the universal reason of substance's infinite, intelligible power. *One and all*: this Spinoza teaches us.

Even in a difficult and seemingly unwinnable conjuncture, the care, friendship and solidarity that militants share is important and revolutionary even if collectively insufficient to overthrow oppressive forces. Hence, in an ethics for militants and an *Ethics* for militants, these affirmative values are essential, and should be actively cultivated, protected and valued over points of doctrinal conformity. 'To do all we can do', as Deleuze (1990, 269) polemically draws out as Spinoza's prime ethical instruction, is always already a collective activity. Through the experimental workings of this chapter, I believe we have now found a means to animate collective desire. This collective desire for freedom, this 'communism of minds', can now find a way of intersecting with the desire of the individual. Fortitude, friendship, courage, solidarity and love are the individual *and* collective's means of staying alive, resisting and revolting against the deadened passive affects and isolation of the neoliberal conjuncture.

Conclusion

Spinoza's philosophy strives to realise the becoming freer of one and all, and while freely reckoning with the great difficulties facing such liberation, nonetheless identifies its possibility within the political, theological and epistemological structures of his era. Such a freedom is a way of life, where the proliferation and pursuit of ideas, friendship, justice, peace and generosity are their own rewards. Such a freedom is a path, the image Spinoza suggests to us, in which what matters most is not the path itself but the way we walk it, as Fischer remarked in Chapter 2 (2007, 82).

In navigating the treacherous themes of servitude, power and desire, and not always successfully, Spinoza's attempt to develop a model of freedom between societies 'as they are' and their most optimal state has illuminated our own. For undertaken across these five chapters has been the pursuit of a foundation for thinking ethically and politically about *one and all*. That is to say, a thinking of the individual and the collective, the individual as of the collective, the collective as an individual, and the collective as emerging from (though not reducible to) the desires of individuals, striving to live well together.

For individuation ascends up to 'the entirety of nature' (E2p13I7s), or as Spinoza later puts it, 'the face of the entire universe' (*facies totius universi*: Ep 64), which is singular being, substance, back to where he begins in *Ethics*. The dynamic modal metaphysics of power outlined early in Chapter 2 became the basis for thinking about this individuation as it extends across human life. All human beings develop from an initially weakened, passive state. Unable to determine the cause of our effects, dependent for our basic needs and understanding on others, virtually all of us fall prey to the servitude of harmful ideas. We become possessed by uncertain hopes or fears, 'boundless' desires with little grounding in reality, and once we are inevitably heartbroken, seek refuge in the cheapest of beliefs. In

disarming the power of sad affects, we come to disarm our internal domination by authoritarian dogmas, and so pass to a state of greater power, which is also a state of greater unity or single-mindedness. We attain our own right, and act as much as from our own nature as we can, rather than from multiple directions, that vacillation that swings us around mercilessly, and to which some resign their own agency, calling it fate, *fortuna*, or God's will. In becoming *one* ourselves, we are then able to recognise the superior good in allying with others, through which, in combining, agreeing and unifying with those of like nature, we collectively become more powerful.

Friendship, conversation and communal participation are par for the course for becoming freer. Indeed, our becoming-freer does not even begin unless we happen to be born and raised in a stable community that can provide for our material needs, and surround us with nurturing relations and societal institutions that enable us to develop our powers. As reasonable, freedom-loving individuals, it is our intrinsic disposition to give something back – that is to say, to contribute to the freedom and life of the community by enabling others to think or live reasonably, and participating in our state's affairs to ensure that the common good is being realised. Freedom of an ethical kind is one with freedom of the political, indeed, the former is not possible without the virtue of the latter.

Nothing is more useful to human beings than each other – well, that is to say, than another who is judged of a common nature, a feature of Spinoza's argument that is less often alighted upon. One who is overwhelmed by sad passions will be of little aid to the freedom-loving individual (though their benevolence to assist the person disempowered by sad passions could help alleviate their servitude, and so would become a source of joy to both). While we are naturally drawn towards those of a common nature, this is an imaginative judgement reflecting a given sense of commonality, and so can be extended outwards, inclusively, (or inwards, exclusively).

In living and participating in communities, we are within collective individuals, beings composed of a number of parts that maintain a stable organisation. Such a proportion or ratio of motion and rest can vary in its capability – my argument has called for a good deal of nuance when applying the category to nation-states, and has supplied an account of relative freedom to identify how some individuals are more powerful than others. This power is not one of potential, or creativity, or some passive dormant multitude inside it – this power is in harmony, harmonious interrelations. The most powerful individual, that is to say, most free (for absolute freedom belongs only to God or Nature, which we modally realise) is one constituted as much of active, self-determining parts that harmoniously interact together as possible. Harmony and peace find their basis in reason, a universal currency which is multiplied in its expenditure. As individuals – human beings, small groups, communities, and up – become composed of a greater part of adequate, reasonable ideas, so their capability and responsibility extends, so their joys become maximised. The good life, in short, but one only possible together.

There may be instances where even the political state is a collective individual – Spinoza's optimum society treats it as such, though we have been more cautious in arguing for communities as collective individuals across the thesis. Either way, what we observe in nature is becoming-collective: individuals becoming-common with one another, then becoming-universal. For the knowledge of the second and third kinds is universal and naturally intelligible, and Spinoza's vision of freedom is one without theoretical restriction. It is its practical application that is more cautious, and which he was very much aware of.

This practical question returns us to the practices of the thesis. I will give a final reflection on its method, survey its general findings, and identify the most important features of its contribution. One of the underlying imperatives of the thesis was to explore and interrogate the very best current research on Spinoza's ethics, politics and epistemology

as it related to human freedom. The result, to say nothing yet of the conceptual material excavated from it, is an unusually varied, lateral account. It brings into dialogue diverse hermeneutic traditions in the United States, France, the UK, the Netherlands and Australia, traditions at times reluctant to converse. The underlying criterion of empowerment that I established early on gave a common ground on which all could usefully contribute. Though these discussions have been sometimes staged as dramatic confrontations, be they literalist or metaphorical, exemplary or elitist, I do not think it amiss to have deployed such a method in Spinoza, whose earliest work dramatises in dialogue form the disputations of Understanding, Love, Reason and Desire (KV 1.2), and which places the collective at the centre-stage of becoming freer.

In drawing on Spinoza's own Latin and challenging its translation in places too, I have provided a new perspective on how we read Spinoza. Proponents of a liberatory *multitudo* across Spinoza's works must now present new proofs for the validity of their argument – so too the egoistic and individualist readers. Translators must take more care when rendering *vulgus*, *plebs*, *multitudo* as simply 'common people'. There is a precise and usually systematic method in Spinoza's Latin, concise if terse, relaying not just the style but also at times the ironic Stoicism of Seneca over the mellifluous gushing of Cicero. His language is a portal through which researchers can explore the interior of his political thought. *Cupiditas* is not the same as *conatus*, and we should take Spinoza seriously when he commands our attention to the three *leges* of human nature, by which he establishes an elementary model of political reason through desire, interest and the common good.

Spinoza was also conversant in multiple languages, and distrusted the polysemic nature of words. When individuals disagree, he tells us, they actually have the same object in mind but are using different words to express it (E2p47s). His language gives form to an underlying criterion of empowerment, measured in different states by the fixed terms of

slave and free man, *vulgus* and *populus*, terms which described absolute states in order to suggest the relative degrees of power that exist between them, exemplars that educate our imagination to consider what might also be possible.

The thesis contributes a number of new concepts to Spinoza scholarship, particularly that of collectivity, commonality and unanimity, and presents a new perspective by which to observe others. I will recap on the course of its argument, and highlight these contributions.

We began with the problem of servitude in Spinoza, wherein individuals are possessed by harmful ideas of which they are not the adequate cause of, but which provide an explanatory frame that gives meaning, if not reward, to their disempowerment. This was a pertinent if less common place to begin thinking about freedom, in challenging us to ascertain why individuals are not free in the first place, and what prevents us from becoming freer – a question that would in turn determine what freedom actually is. Servitude emerges in one's inability to moderate strong sad affects (§1.2), and is associated with illusory fears, fortune and superstition, by which authorities exploit and dominate their subjects. This domination can become so effective that subjects fight for their servitude as if for salvation, by which they experience the desire of a powerful individual or class as if it were their own, and actively defend it (§1.6.1). At the same time, we identified and challenged a 'voluntary servitude' reading in la Boétie, Deleuze and Guattari, London and Abensour, and argued that individuals are not complicit or volunteering their servitude – rather, they have become possessed or owned by the ideas of another.

In Chapter 2 I gave a comprehensive outline of empowerment. Here I made a number of new contributions to existing debates. I presented an exegesis of the conatus doctrine (§2.2), resolving some issues around its interpretation, and identified this elemental and dynamic striving to persevere in being as defining all things, correlating to its power, and

realised through desire (§§2.3-4). This presented desire as something multiform (d_1-d_4) and to which conatus is not wholly reducible, being a specific kind of consciousness. I distinguished *potentia* (capability) from *potestas* (responsibility) for a base model of human empowerment, through which desire as consciousness could be understood. I also conceived of it as an ‘environment’ of ideas, a network of associated affects, memories, imaginings (fantasies, purposes), symbols and beliefs, common notions and intuitive truths, out of which a specific desire emerges. While neither morally normative nor intrinsically liberatory, over the course of three stress tests (§2.5.1-3) I was able to advance a concept of relative freedom, by which individuals become more active through their desire, to the extent that this desire is composed as much of adequate, reasonable ideas as possible. For reason correlates to the true good of human nature, as Spinoza often makes clear, and reasonable desires are those that correlate to our actual self-preservation, resulting in more maximal joys.

This led to a number of novel claims at the end regarding what one can do with desires. We can educate ourselves and others in the most lasting of joys (§2.6.1), and re-programme our desires and habits so as to more freely seek what aids our well-being (§2.6.4), while attuned to the causes of akrasia (§2.5.2). We can become as self-determining of our desires and effects as we can be, using every resource available to become more knowledgeable about them. This will involve at times freely accepting what is necessary so as to remain independent, even empowered and self-determining in a difficult situation (§2.6.2), so as to learn and gain from it.

It also involves refusing to compromise or give ground to others when they are possessed by inadequate ideas or sad passions (§2.6.3). There are times when we must be resilient, ‘willful’, times when speaking the truth or persisting in our desires is not popular or may even be dangerous. It is not for the greater good to cower but to speak out, for

empowerment is always in becoming-collective, and our protest or perseverance may be the sole or little means by which others can overcome the spell of their servitude and join with us. Our conative relations reveal our interdependence, and our freedom is strengthened collectively through friendship and cooperation (§2.6.5). Reason and the social become inextricably one.

Chapter 3 accounted for this coincidence of ethical reason and societal flourishing in Spinoza through our unanimity hypothesis (§3.2.2), another original contribution to the field. In six premises, we identified how human beings are naturally predisposed to form collective groups, a process we called collectivity, and these associations are more secure and effective the more they are grounded on a reasonable common good. We then re-read the TTP to sift out its account of collectivity, focusing on the instrumental role of the imagination and prophecy (§3.3), both of which were affirmed as social goods. My justification of prophecy on these grounds is original, though inconvenient for Spinoza's own liberatory politics, while my account of imagination bolsters arguments made by Gatens and James. I accounted for the Hebrew Republic (§3.4), and took a middle path between exemplary and elitist readings using the universal faith (§3.5), arguing that Spinoza's politics is interested in obedience to unanimity, a social good, but found fault in Spinoza's critique of the *vulgus*, and his lack of facility for enabling individuals to think more reasonably (§3.6). This became the basis of a persistent critique that characterised my later arguments: if a democratic political theory cannot account for how individuals become more self-determining and capable of thinking for themselves, then its prescriptions are ineffective, and will in practice prove futile.

This critical note continued into Chapter 4, in which, against a prevailing trend in the critical literature, I assessed how the TP marked a distinct development in Spinoza's thought, placing the agency of becoming freer onto the state. I observed a conflict in the text between

a critique of utopianism and a teleological attention to a state's highest good (§4.2). This allowed me to explore *una veluti mente* in a discussion which marked another original contribution, considering it no mere counterfactual but a now-explicit politics of unanimity. I identified how a collective investment of desire is the basis of its security, a kind of popular sovereignty at the heart of each political form. Yet states are only as powerful as their constituent parts' abilities to think and act cooperatively and peacefully (§4.4).

Spinoza's reasonable republic is a remarkable attempt to make the state think through its assemblies, live through its laws, and produce reasonable citizens, an account whose features claim to be derived scientifically from human nature. Yet I closed with a challenge to Spinoza and to those who clarify in 'collegial' fashion his thought (to borrow Huenemann's phrase from the Introduction), which is at times inconsistent or underdeveloped, rather than critically *and* contextually assess it. Spinoza provided no account as to how individuals would realise a reasonable republic. For if, as he remarks in *Ethics*, citizens and not slaves are governed and led to 'freely do what is best' (E2p49s), then Spinoza needs to account for the very animation by which individuals combine together and realise the common good, particularly with the intractable problem of servitude identified earlier.

This raised a pertinent question for the last chapter as to how we come to desire freedom. In seeking a model for determining political change (§5.2), I challenged Spinoza's own weak account of rebellion, as well as its merely ethical readers, before turning to Matheron and indignation as an affect of resistance (§5.2.3). Though finding too much in it to jeopardise its utility, it enabled me to identify emulation as an imitative affect of desire by which individuals could establish meaningful and lasting bonds of solidarity, through which to organise political movements around (§5.2.5). Reaching the limits of Spinoza's own thought, the argument then pursued collective desire itself, drawing together a diverse

range of political thinkers and philosophers by which it identified the importance of interdependence (§5.3.4) common sense (§5.4), and political subjectivity (§5.5).

The nature of collective was finally identified through Gramsci and Reich in enabling a *common sense*, being a sense of commonality, and a politicised sense of what is common and belonging to the commons. It provides one way to animate progressive political movements, but we also noted that such movements will not realise the universal good of enabling as many as possible to become freer unless, via Reich, they can produce a capability to think and act self-determinedly in citizens, a democratic *social responsibility*. This finally turned to the state, going beyond Spinoza in exploring how citizens become capable not just of being citizens, but of being reasonable and free human beings (§5.6).

In the final arc of the thesis I travelled some distance beyond Spinoza, but along a path determined by the previous chapters. For such a politics of collective desire locates the political in everyday life, and makes use of all opportunities for becoming freer with others in the most modest of ways, from friendship and teaching, to community work and political campaigning. Though his model of empowerment is founded on descriptive laws, it is indelibly normative, indicating what human beings might best experience, if we collectively put our minds to it, realising our common if not universal good. From the foregoing argument for the collectivist Spinoza, such a freedom is for one and all.

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